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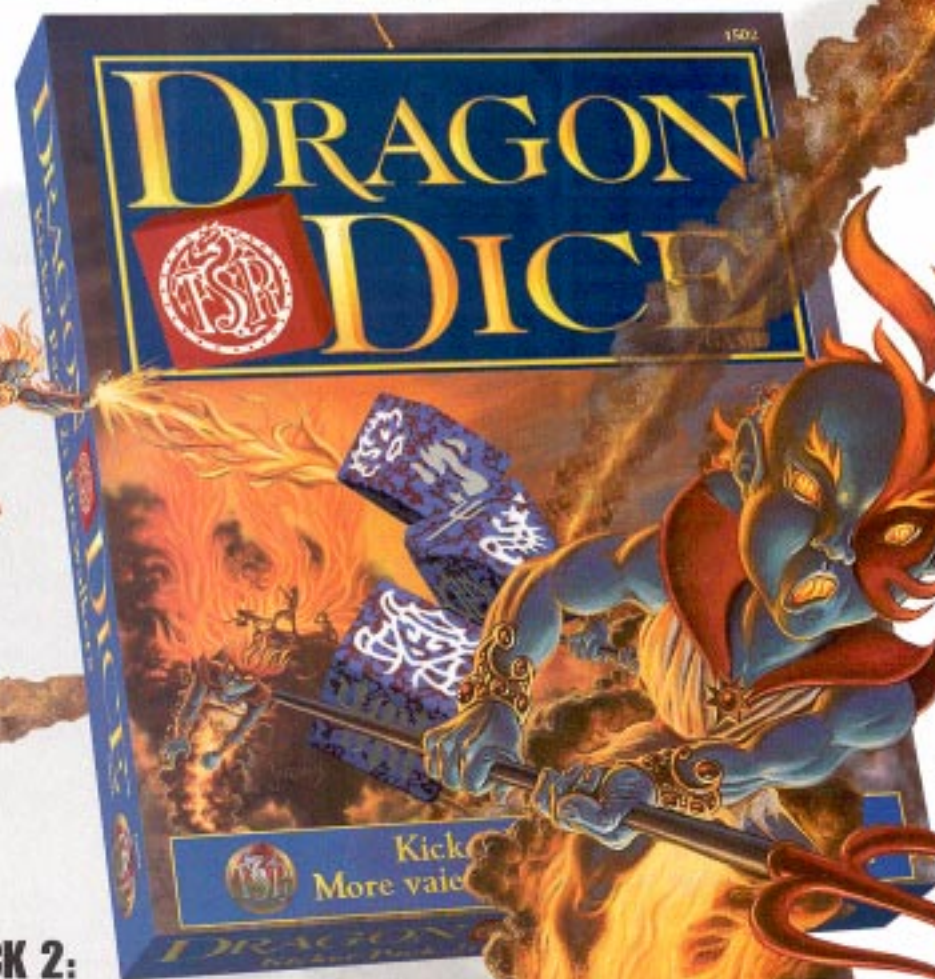
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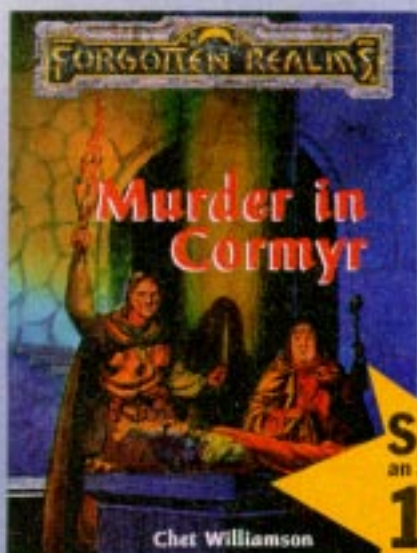


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# The Wyrm's Turn

## A Point of Reference, a Point of Departure

Recently I had the pleasure to be the guest at a conference on world building in the Fantasy and Role-Playing Games forum on CompuServe (that means I was the target of all the hard questions). One question in particular sticks out in my mind. "Outside of the game books," it went, "where do you go for material to design worlds?"

I replied with my standard answer: the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Why? Let me try something. Think of a warrior. Are you picturing someone like Conan or King Arthur? Chances are, you are.

That's the culture factor. If you're like most gamers in the U.S., you probably didn't even think of a samurai, janissary, or any other warrior from Asian, African, or American history. Most people don't. We're very Euro-centric about our games. The standard we think of is European. (Think of all the Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Celts, or whatever you've seen in fantasy games and fantasy art.) Even with all the fantasy trappings, that's what it all comes down to.

We are ultimately the products of our culture. Most Americans probably know the old European myths and history better than any others, and these form the roots of our imagination. We all know about King Arthur, Tristan and Isolde, the Ring of the Niebelungen, the Trojan War, valkyries, the Norman Invasion, the Crusades. . .

How many know about Aleksandr Nevski? Who knows the legend of Yamato Takeru? We know some Arab fantasies like Sinbad and Ali Baba, and of real people like Saladin. But how about Harun al-Rashid? Do you know whether he is real or myth? Who was he? Who knows the tales of the American Indians and the Inuit? Do you know the Egyptian Tale of Sinhue?

Is it bad that we've got this European mind set? Not necessarily. That which is familiar is both

comforting and easy to work with. In a gaming environment, there's far less prep-time when one assumes generic medieval European fantasy like the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting. It's a milieu we understand, and we can just roll up our sleeves (and our dice) and get right into the game. Make it something exotic, like Kara-Tur, Maztica, or Zakhara (all from the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign), and it requires more background knowledge and time to bring everyone up to speed. This is why fewer people play these campaigns but they are so vociferous in their support of them. There is a considerable investment of time and effort to make something foreign into something familiar. It's always worth the effort, though.

You are in control of your world. You can do anything you want, make it as exotic or as down home as you feel comfortable. Your world can even be free of contemporary pseudo-values (A.K.A. "political correctness"). Here you can allow some realism into your mix. Only about seven or eight percent of Japan's population were samurai, but how many people want to play a peasant when you can play a samurai? Injustice and intolerance were real (and this is where your exotic cultures can come into conflict with the more familiar European worlds).

No matter what kind of game you play, you can easily introduce a few foreign elements to add some spice. Folklore and history from every nation and culture are treasure troves waiting to be exploited. Even if you favor generic fantasy, try throwing in something exotic. Massive amounts of research aren't needed; just a little time with the right source.

I recommend the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.



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DRAGON #227

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March 1996  
Volume XX, No. 10  
**Issue #227**



### The Secrets of Successful Dungeon Building

**Mathew Guss**

*It's more than just drawing lines on a sheet of graph paper.  
How do you really design a dungeon that breathes?*

Page 8

### Report from Undermountain

**Steven Schend**

*In Waterdeep, there is a tavern that holds the  
entrance to one of the biggest, meanest dungeons  
ever made. Here's what's been happening lately*

Page 14



### Journeys to the Deepest Dungeons

**Wolfgang Baur**

*Okay, you want to explore the Underdark.  
To improve your player character's chances  
of survival, read this first.*

Page 34

### They're in the Book

**John Baichtal**

*How do you hide a clue in a library? Better  
yet, how do you **find** a clue in a library?*

Page 69



### And the Rockets' Red Glare

**Dale A. Hueber**

*Firework magic adds a new aura of flash  
and dash to your mage's portfolio.*

Page 93





## Departments

### ***Dragon's Bestiary:*** **Monsters of the Underdark**

Wolfgang Baur

*Ten new terrifying creatures from the world without light, presented in MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® style.*

Page 20

### **Ecology of the Osquip**

Johnathan M. Richards

*Oh, rats!*

Page 49

### ***Bazaar of the Bizarre:*** **Dwarven Magical Items**

Robert S. Mullin

*Why do we think only elves have the edge when it comes to producing magical items?*

Page 56

### ***Down to Scale:*** **Paint Like a Pro**

Daniel R. Williamson and  
J. Paul Bruton III

*Some simple tricks that can make your miniatures really come to life*

Page 105

## Columns

3 ..... The Wyrms Turn  
*Culture-centrism and the games we play.*

6 ..... D-Mail  
*Your comments on the new design for DRAGON® Magazine.*

46 ..... Sage Advice  
*Skip Williams answers questions on were-rats, Krynnish bards, and aging.*

50 ..... Role of Books  
*John C. Bunnell takes a look at strategy books for WotC's Magic: the Gathering.*

55 ..... RPGA® Network News  
*Network coordinator Scott Douglas discusses writing tournament modules.*

89 ..... Cons & Pros  
*We let you know where the conventions are and who's going to be there.*

97 ..... Forum  
*Letters this month contain theories and opinions (and a few questions) for one and all.*

110 ..... Role-playing Reviews  
*Rick Swan plays some truly frightening games.*

120 ..... The Current Clack  
*Allen Varney talks about the industry, GDW, WW, and TSR.*

## **SPECIAL THIS ISSUE!**

73 **BLOOD WARS™ Card Game**  
**Two-Player Rules**  
**Supplement**



## Other Material

62 ..... Floyd  
66 ..... Gamer's Guide  
100..... DragonMirth  
103 ..... Knights of the Dinner Table  
116..... TSR Previews

## FICTION

76 **Mission from**  
**Kendermore** Part One

(DRAGONLANCE®: Tales of the FIFTH AGE)

Harold J. Johnson

*Ten kender set out from Kendermore on a desperate mission to save their world; but who can save them from each other?*







We asked for input on the redesign of *DRAGON® Magazine*, and you told us what you think. Thanks for the comments!

## The New *DRAGON® Magazine*

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

Congratulations. *DRAGON Magazine* #225 is the single most useful issue I have received since subscribing some seven years ago. While I suspect most of this had to do with the excellent GREYHAWK® article, the India article and others were also well-done and enjoyable.

As for what's missing, I can't say I'll miss *Yamara*, and I agree that computer games and cards are best served by other magazines. I also like (I think) the new layout, as you seem to have gotten rid of that odd triangle icon that's been on every page of the last few issues.

The "Campaign Classics" idea is great, and this reader hopes that this becomes a haven for GREYHAWK more than anything else, though I'm sure others will disagree.

I've never really been interested in *DRAGON® Magazine's* fiction, and since it is a TSR magazine, I don't think it's a bad idea to focus on TSR's gameworlds in the fiction area. Although I tired of the

DRAGONLANCE® setting some time ago and will be slightly frustrated during the year or so it will take for the current story to end, I think it's a good idea in general.

What else? The "Rumblings" enhancement is an excellent idea, and I'm glad you've retained "Role-Playing Reviews." Actually, it was nice to see that the writer actually used the "die rating" that had so often appeared in explanation but not in the actual reviews. Good work.

I'm also looking forward to the *DRAGON Magazine Annual*. I'm not exactly sure what this thing is going to contain, but it sounds interesting nonetheless.

Just as a final, minor note, I also appreciated the full-page look at the cover painting that appeared opposite your editorial. Is this something you intend to do every month?

Overall, everyone connected with the last issue should be proud. It's nice to see the formula rattled a bit and, most of all, it was nice for this veteran to see GREYHAWK treated as it should have been when still an active line at TSR. Excellent work, everyone. I look forward to the next issue.

Iquander  
TSR Online, AOL

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

First and foremost, Bravo! The new look and format of *DRAGON Magazine* are not only incredible but also a long time coming. It is by far a much better-looking magazine than it has ever been.

Also, I have to congratulate the entire staff of TSR on a job well done with the *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA™* series. Those, too, were a long time coming. Now, DMs world-wide will have to tote less material for game sessions. Also, when it comes time to roll for magical items, we are not restricted to those found in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* or the *Tome of Magic*.

I would really like to see a periodic update to the *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA* series, much like the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annuals*. With all the new magical items in the *DRAGON Magazines* since issue 200,

and all the new products since starting the encyclopedias, I believe there would be enough for another volume.

The main thing I'd like to see is a set of encyclopedias similar to the *ENCYCLOPEDIA MAGICA*, but for spells. I understand that you came out with the spell cards in the past, and these were helpful. The only problem is that there were so many sources of spells that were neglected. For instance, *Greyhawk® Adventures*, *Dragon Kings*, *Dark Sun®*, *The Complete Book of Elves*, and many, many more. I do believe I am not the only person to feel that this would be a valuable tool for role-playing.

Brian J. Van Court  
Jacksonville, FL

Brian, you're thinking just like one of the game wizards here at TSR. Such huge and exhaustive compilations take time to produce, but keep an eye on the TSR Previews section of the magazine later this year. You won't be disappointed.

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

Yeah! GREYHAWK is not a "forgotten realm." Thanks for the article and the glimpse of GREYHAWK history. As a GREYHAWK DM, I really appreciate anything about this original campaign.

Les Bowman  
Washington, MO

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

Bravo, *DRAGON Magazine*! On the whole, I am very impressed with the new look of the magazine. I particularly liked the extra space devoted to the feature topic of the month. I found something in just about every article in the issue that I can use in my game. I also like the new DM's column. It's nice to see that these practical tips for DMs will be a continuing feature.

I was disappointed to see that "First Quest" was gone. I enjoyed reading it every month. Also, there is one technical flaw in the new format that I felt should be brought to your attention. The inside columns are hard to read with the new

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binding style. The last few (or first few, depending on the page) letters are hard to read without really forcing the magazine open.

On the whole, it was an excellent issue, and I look forward to continued high quality from you.

Simon Chambers  
Via e-mail

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

As a reader and subscriber for several years, I have mixed feelings regarding the present and the apparent future of this magazine. While the many improvements were made in the magazine, almost all of which I deem to be excellent, several things do bother me. In my humble opinion, there should be more instant-ready items in the magazine, like spells, monsters, adventure ideas, characters, etc., that are generic enough to insert into any campaign.

Some players do not have access to the myriad new campaign worlds TSR, Inc., unleashes. You need to bear that in mind and avoid printing too many world-specific articles.

Still, I would like to say that I am very pleased with *DRAGON Magazine* in general.

Oran Magal  
20 Ilanot St.  
Kefar Maas PT  
Israel 49925

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

I just received the newest issue, and I must say that I am very impressed! I like the new look. The binding is better, making a more durable magazine. In my collection of *DRAGON Magazines*, the staple-bound magazines tend to rip more as the edge becomes creased with use.

The only problem I see so far with the new binding is that some of the text close to the binding is almost lost. I'm not sure if anything can be done about that.

With the new look, I see a new figure. The dragon icon at the end of the articles is a nice touch. Now, if you could bring back the ampersand symbol as well...

I especially like the layout you have given the magazine. The columns and text flow better and are easier to read. And adding cartoons to the middle breaks the format nicely.

The artwork has always been superb. Easley, Elmore, and the others give us views of worlds we only dream of. Keep up the good work.

Loyal subscriber,  
John Tomkins  
Via e-mail

*Thanks for all the kind words. We are opening the gutters of the magazine a bit with this issue, so the glue in the binding shouldn't be a problem any more.*

## The Lost Swords

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

In "Bazaar of the Bizarre" in issue #188, there were 10 swords featured that were up for grabs in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting. These were "lost swords." What I was wondering was, where can they be found? And if fellow readers can write me and let me know more information on these and other swords. (I'm an amateur DM, still learning.)

John W. Porter  
P.O. Box 128 M/S 61-52-10  
Tennessee Colony, TX 75880

*John, you're the DM. You can put those swords anywhere you want. That's why you have all that power. You can replace items, duplicate unique ones, even change settings you don't like.*

*We'd like to hear from you.*

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## On The Cover:

This painting by Jeff Easley depicts a gargantuan dragon surrounded by her (his? who can tell?) adoring followers. Which is just about the last thing you'd want to see after stepping out of that dark cavern you've been exploring.

Jeff just keeps cranking these great images out, and there were a few that hadn't been snapped up by other areas of the company and we were lucky enough to get there first. We know you love 'em as much as we do, so we grabbed 'em for you. The clack has it that this one might be seen again on a calendar!

Enjoy!



# The Secrets of Successful Dungeon Building



Painting by William O'Connor



# Making dungeons real is half the game

by Mathew Guss

illustrated by William O'Connor and Mathew Guss

**R**andor and Valg put their weapons away and rested their shoulders against the dust-covered door. Like so many in the winding catacombs, this one was locked. One quick thrust from their armored bodies and the door groaned, dirt and dust raining down from the frame overhead. The portal resisted but for a moment, then fell away slowly, its hinges emitting a deep, agonizing moan.

A large chamber waited beyond. The two adventurers hefted their weapons and advanced cautiously. Like so many of the catacomb's other rooms, this one appeared empty, its great dimensions lacking any furnishings. Then something moved in the darkness, a heavy body that shifted ponderously upon the dust covered, ancient stone floor. It rose to its feet and rushed toward the startled pair, as if its only reason for existence was to destroy the hapless adventurers.

Sound familiar? Reduce the description to its most basic elements, and what remains is the typical dungeon room. A locked door, a big room (usually empty), and a monster that attacks the player characters without hesitation. Then there is the inevitable treasure trove with perhaps a trap or two. Standard fare for any dungeon. Why is it that monsters always seem to sit around doing absolutely nothing, just waiting for a group of adventurers to come along? And why are dungeons littered with so many empty rooms (except for ones with monsters, of course)?

There are many factors which contribute to enjoyable role-playing. The most important, and perhaps most overlooked, element of any AD&D® adventure is the dungeon itself. A detailed campaign setting is, of course, essential. It sets the stage and provides a degree of continuity within which players thrive. It is also understood that strong, well-rounded characters are critical to ensuring player satisfaction. But what makes or breaks the best gaming session is the dungeon's quality. Unfortunately, this is the very area most often given the least attention. The reason most Dungeon Masters build poor dungeons is that they don't really build them at all. They grab graph paper, lay down some corridors and rooms, fill them with monsters, traps, and treasures, and call it good. The actual dungeon is reduced to a collection of obstacles that the players must overcome. Such dungeons are created backward.

Essentially, the Dungeon Master develops an intricate location that exists only for the few hours or days the player characters spend in it. It may be a ruin thousands of years old, but it is designed as if it were only a few weeks old, its only purpose being for the party to plunder. This backward approach to dungeon building produces floor plans with no rhyme or reason, and corridors and levels sprawling across sheets of graph paper. Rooms simply house monsters that sit around (in some cases for centuries, unaffected by time), waiting for the characters to appear. Traps serve no logical purpose other than to slow down characters. Finally, the dungeon offers up treasures with no relevance to the dungeon in which they are found.

There is more to a successful dungeon than several sleepless nights spent placing rooms on a map and populating them with the requisite monsters, traps, treasures, and clues. If you take the time to address the following issues, you will succeed in designing your creation from the beginning, not the end.

## Decide your dungeon's purpose

The first and most critical step toward designing a dungeon is deciding what it is in the first place. Any dungeon, whether it is a crypt, a ruin, a cavern complex, or a castle, must serve a specific purpose. Why does it exist? What is its purpose? Was it built as a laboratory for an ambitious wizard? Is it a noble family's mausoleum? Is it the ruin of a castle that now serves as a dragon's lair? You must decide up front and be specific.

In AD&D terminology, "dungeons" can be practically anything. They can be pyramids, mines, towers, taverns, cellars, monasteries, palaces, windmills, druidic shrines, shops, apartments, and so on.

If it doesn't have a reason for existing, you won't know what to do with it or what should and should not go in it. A dismal sewer system shouldn't have the same features and functions of an armorer's guildhall. Nor will a castle have the same layout as a cathedral. By figuring out what your dungeon is, you have a better understanding of what it will, and will not, offer the PCs.

## Create your dungeon's creator

The next step is to determine who made the dungeon. All constructions must have an architect. The creator is an integral player in any dungeon. Give the dungeon a creator, and you give it personality. Is your dungeon's creator one person or a group of characters? Was the priest who commissioned your dungeon-temple a benevolent, kind-hearted man? Or was he a cruel, wicked power-monger who stole vast amounts of the faithful's offerings? Did he have a family? Were they reclusive or highly active in the political and social arenas? The creator may be the villain of the adventure, or he may have passed away centuries ago.

Then you should determine why the creator would want to build the dungeon in the first place. What purpose does the dungeon serve? Is it a formidable tower built to defend the rugged frontier? A secret prison to house political enemies? A complex of crypts?

## Nothing is free

Dungeons don't come cheap. Digging miles of tunnels or erecting defensive walls around a magnificent palace is expensive and time consuming. It makes sense that most (but not all) creators will be conscious of their investment's cost. They aren't going to build rooms simply for the sake of building them. Nor are they going to spread rooms out at the opposite ends of long, twisting corridors without a specific reason.

The layout should be justified in the creator's eyes. Is it defensive or aesthetic in nature? Is the layout efficient or are the occupants going to exhaust themselves during their daily routines rushing from chamber to chamber? Even considering the possibility of slave labor and magical assistance, would a dungeon builder really build a sprawling complex in which more than half the features serve no purpose whatsoever? Dungeon designers must consider that on the most fundamental level, bigger is not necessarily better.





This does not mean only small dungeons should exist. Large dungeons are most certainly necessary. A tomb built to hold the 400 Cavaliers of the Silk Veil would be massive, as would an abandoned dwarven city. The key to size is ensuring that every element makes sense.

## Start with the essentials

You should make a list of required features and rooms before the dungeon is mapped. With every room, you must decide whether it benefits the dungeon's intended occupants. For example, a

prison should have a large quantity of cells, rooms for the guards, a torture chamber, storage rooms, a kitchen and pantry. Should it have a formal dining chamber? Probably not. What about a wizard's laboratory? Perhaps, if the guard is staffed by a wizard or two.

A good dungeon's biggest pitfall is a room that serves either the wrong purpose or no purpose other than to house a monster, trap, or treasure. The most exciting and challenging chambers are those that the characters associate with something tangible; like a torture chamber, a room of fiery pits, or the library with the screaming banshees. If you

don't know why the dungeon's creator would have included the room, erase it. Empty rooms are two-dimensional distractions. Keep them out of the creation at all costs.

## Consider the visual details

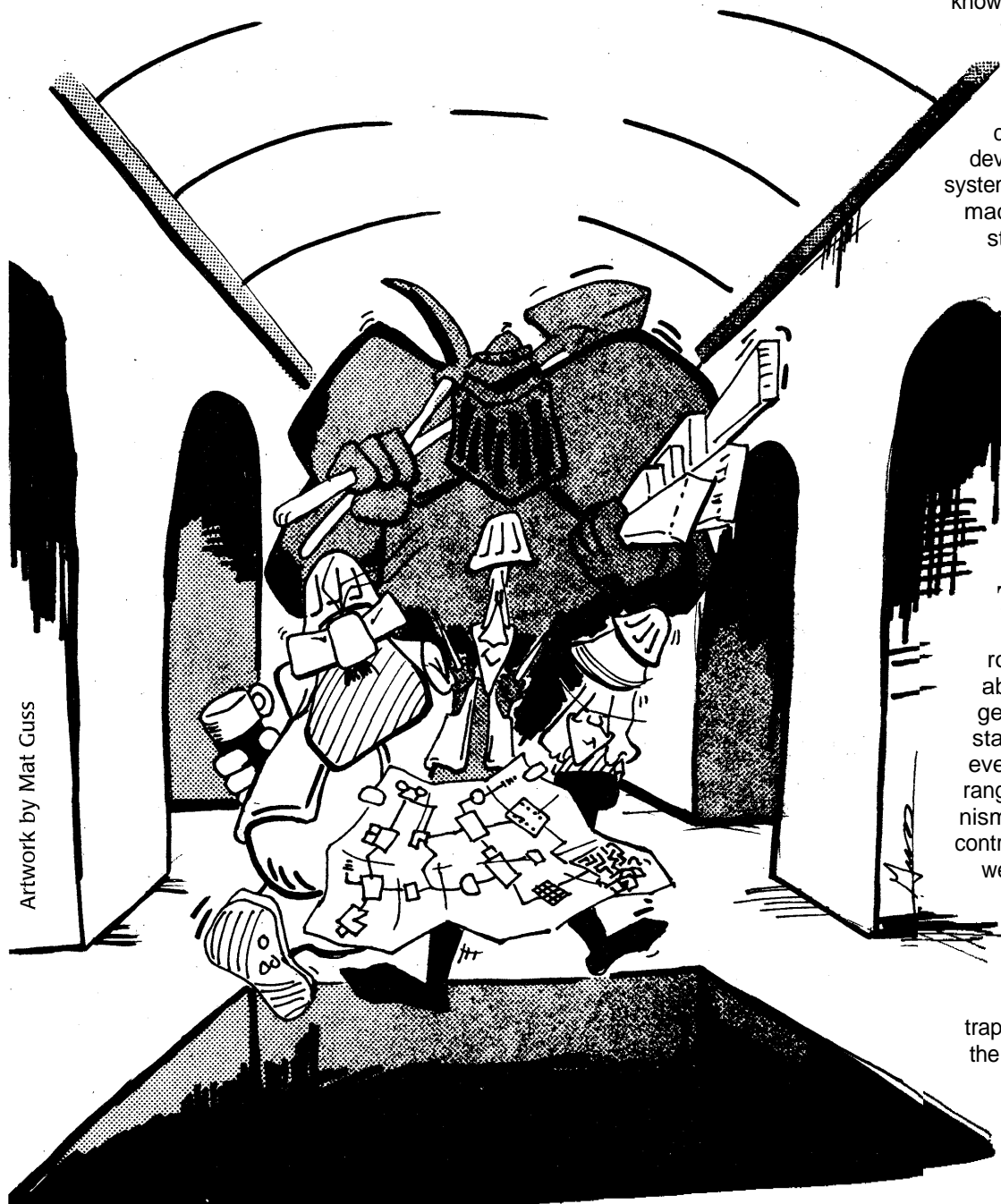
Take a moment to decide what additional features the dungeon should have. If it is a castle, will it have a drawbridge and moat? If it is a temple, will it have stone gargoyles as ornamentation? How many levels would the creator build? Is more than one level necessary? Should the dungeon have a sewage or waste disposal system? (Would the creator know how to design one?) Does

the dungeon require more than one entrance? If so, why? Are there stairs connecting levels, or is the creator advanced enough to develop an elevator or teleport system? Are the walls and floors made of solid rock or fitted stone? How will the entire dungeon be decorated? Will it be Spartan and plain or will it sport ornamental banisters, intricate iron workings, and fantastic mosaics? The more details brain stormed before drawing the dungeon, the more clear it will be in your mind.

## To trap or not to trap

Next to useless monster rooms, traps are the most abused feature of any dungeon. In a typical dungeon a standard trap goes off whenever any creature gets within range of the triggering mechanism. Such universal defenses contradict simple logic. Would a wealthy man defend his treasure in such a way that he could never reach it without risk of death or dismemberment?

Before placing the first trap ask this one question: Was the dungeon designed for continual use? If, as with a castle, the answer is yes, then there can't be many traps. What good is a castle if the guards



Artwork by Mat Guss



spent half the day avoiding them and the rest of the time pulling their hapless comrades out of them? On the other hand, a building intended never to be entered again would logically have a full array of deadly traps that might not discriminate against victims.

The presence of magic contributes to an unfortunate tendency toward building absurd traps, like 50'-long corridors in which the entire ceiling or walls close instantly to crush intruders; 200'-deep pits (as if a 100' fall were not enough); a curtain of whirling, animated blades protecting a small chest of coins; or the ultimate teleportation trap which transports its victims to the liquid stone heart of an active volcano.

You should be careful with trap designs. Even with magical assistance traps should stay within the realm of credibility. A 30'-deep pit lined with spikes is as treacherous as a 100' wonder pit. Two-ton stone blocks crush victims as thoroughly as entire sections of ceiling. Tricks and traps are designed to confound, confuse, detain, injure, and potentially kill intruders. Simple traps can produce the same results as gargantuan traps without the added cost and necessary space.

Even if a trap is magical, it should have some logical activation process. Players want to know what they did to set off the trap, and simply saying "You stepped into a specific square on the map" is not a good response. Activation processes provide traps with built-in means of avoidance. Treasure must be counted from time to time, so the creator must have a means of accessing his chambers without risk of personal injury or death. Player characters should enjoy the same privilege.

Traps also leave their mark, particularly if they have already gone off. A falling stone block will polish the walls and floor as it crashes down. Pits have thin, black outlines, and arrow traps can be seen as small holes in the chamber's ceiling or walls. By detailing the traps you also provide satisfying results for thieves who make their Find/Remove Traps role.

## Draw it out.

Draw the dungeon only after you have addressed the above issues. If all goes well, you have a mental picture of what the creation will look like. You can see the narrow corridors, the rooms filled with all manner of relevant furnishings. You can visualize the secret staircase that leads down to the mage's private summoning chamber, or the human-shaped targets in the assassin's gymnasium.

The first map should be of the dungeon as it was originally created. Lay it out as if it were a brand new construction. Map out the rooms as if you were the creator laying out simple drawings for the architect. Once the rooms are placed, locate the traps in their logical positions. Now draw the dungeon as it will appear for the player characters. If it is a thousand years old, reflect that in the dungeon's condition. If it is abandoned, decide what caused it to fall into disarray and disuse. Were there earthquakes that collapsed ceilings and shifted doors in their frames? Was there a flood? A fire? Was it pillaged? If so, how much treasure will be left for the characters to uncover? Are some traps no longer functioning? A centuries-old-dungeon shouldn't look and feel as if it were built yesterday.

## Bring on the monsters

The key to successfully populating a dungeon with monsters is logic. You must first decide why there should even be any monsters in the dungeon. If the player characters had to force their way in, how did the monsters get there before them? What's more, if this dungeon is centuries old, how are the monsters managing to stay alive? Wouldn't they prey upon each other, leaving the final monster to die of starvation or lack of oxygen?

You must next decide how the monsters got into the dungeon and why they choose to stay. Did they dig their way in by accident? Were they drawn to the dungeon by a powerful spell? Are they the direct descendants of the original monster guards? If the dungeon is still in use, are the monsters the pets of the creator, or are the creator and his people the actual monsters?

Regardless of their purpose dungeons contain only three basic monster categories: original monsters, accidental monsters, and intentional occupants.

Original monsters are the creatures the creator brought in (or allowed in). They are the slave labor force, the guards, or perhaps pets of the original builder. If the construction is old, then they are the descendants of the original creatures. This also includes those mon-

sters, usually magical or supernatural in origin, which are bound to remain there forever (golems, elementals, etc.). Sometimes the creator himself is an original monster.

Accidental monsters are those intruders that happen upon the dungeon by accident. They are the giant weasels that slip into the dungeon in search of a lair, the giant scorpions that

fall through the hole in the crypt's ceiling, or the umber hulk that burrows into the complex. These creatures stumble upon the dungeon and find dungeon chambers and corridors suitable as hunting grounds and lairs. It is only poor timing that brings the player characters into contact with these creatures.



Artwork by Mat Guss

Intentional occupants are those monsters that seek out, or that are spawned by, dungeons. Intelligent undead, slimes, cloak-ers, and mimics all look for dungeons in which to thrive. Dragons seek out ruins and caverns to make their lairs. Vampires build crypts to protect their coffins. Much like player characters, intentional occupants are only at their best when in a dungeon.

No matter what type of monster occupies your creation, remember that all dungeons are miniature ecosystems. All living creatures require food, water, and oxygen. Determine how the monsters meet these fundamental needs. Will the big monster eat all the little monsters, or will they develop a mutually supportive peace agreement? Where is the water supply? How do the monsters get in and out of your dungeon if the front door is closed? How do they get in and out of the rooms if all the doors are locked? Where do they get their treasure from? Did they bring it with them or did they plunder this dungeon's treasure vaults?

## Adding the treasure

It is a mistake to put treasure in a dungeon simply to reward player character efforts. Too often players and DMs see treasure as an obligation. The players kill the monster, they get treasure. They find a secret door, they get

treasure. Taken to the extreme, this is almost like the trained animal acts we see in the circus.

That should not be the purpose of treasure. Treasure is the accumulated wealth and property of the dungeon's occupants. It is the treasure horde of the Viking king, the plunder of the hobgoblin war band, the ill-gotten goods of the thieves' guild. It is anything considered valuable by the inhabitants of the campaign. It is in the dungeon because the occupants want to hold on to it, not to give it away to the first band of player characters to come along.

Like every element of a good dungeon, treasure has to make sense. What good is a *longsword +2* to a priest? Why would a troll roam around carrying a sack of platinum coins? Why would a pair of displacer beasts choose to protect a small cache of scrolls and potions? You should design the contents and location of most dungeon treasure to benefit the dungeon's creator and current occupants, not the players.

Dungeons offer two types of treasure: protected and procured. Protected treasure encompasses all of the wealth stored within the dungeon by the original occupant. This treasure should reflect the tastes and

personality of the creator. It should be located throughout the dungeon in places and containers that match the theme of the creation.

Procured treasure defines all valuables found on monsters or in their lairs. Many monsters will likely have brought their treasure with them, but a few may have successfully acquired some of the dungeon's protected wealth as well.

Dungeon treasure is an ideal opportunity to inject creativity and variety into a campaign. Not every non-player character covets light, portable gold coins, and bullion. In European history, the wealthy knight was envied not for the coin in his pocket but for what he did with it. In medieval Holland, the rich paid fortunes for a single tulip bulb. Base your treasure hoards on what the creator considers valuable. A dungeon builder with a high public profile might collect fine clothing, rare perfumes, expensive jewelry, and such. Still others with different tastes might invest in works of art, filling their dungeon with expensive tapestries, rugs, and beautiful statues. The creator may purchase prize horses, collect antique furniture or rare spices. Treasure by its very nature implies something of rare and extreme value. Coins and gems are difficult to make exciting. Treasure troves

offering mostly coins inevitably shift the party's attention to magic items as a justifiable reward, which can become a DM's worst nightmare.

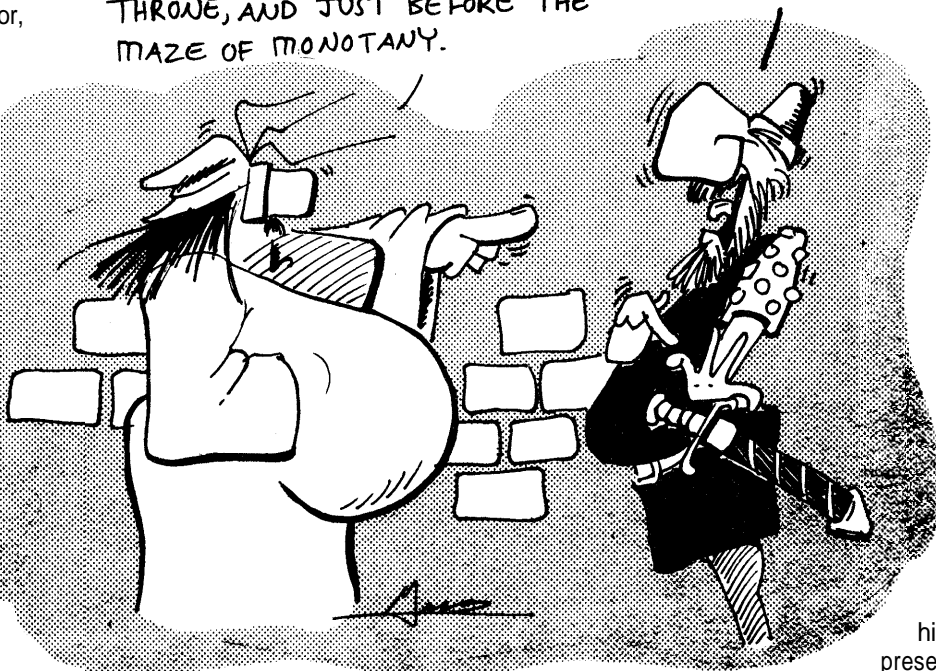
Relying on the basic treasure types cheats players out of a whole dimension of treasure hunting satisfaction; namely deciding what to do with it once they have it. Consider the difficulties of carrying off a marble statue valued at thousands of coins, but that weighs almost half a ton. What if the characters steal an evil priest's treasure chest only to discover it is filled with Letters of Exchange, each with the priest's name on it issued from the Overlord's personal treasury? Not all that glitters is as convenient as a gold coin.

## Putting it all together

Implementing this dungeon design process is as simple as writing a story outline. With the basic framework of the adventure in mind, you prepare a short history addressing each of the steps presented.

OKAY, SO THE KITCHEN IS DOWN  
BEYOND THE HALL OF INFINITE DOORS,  
TURN LEFT AT THE PORTALS TO  
AMBIGUITY, THEN A RIGHT, TWO  
LEFTS, UP THE STAIRS OF REDUN-  
DANCY, RIGHT AT THE SUPERFLUOUS  
THROVE, AND JUST BEFORE THE  
MAZE OF MONOTANY.

NO NO NO!!  
LEFT AT THE  
THROVE, LEFT!  
HONESTLY, WHAT  
DOES IT TAKE?



Artwork by Mat Guss



Players know when a dungeon isn't built right. They may not know exactly where it falls short, but they can probably feel it. Dungeons that defy logic, which don't make sense, which don't rise above the standard room-monster-trap formula, can lead to boredom and the feeling of being cheated. A good dungeon must be more than a pattern of rooms and corridors. It must have a personality all its own. Dungeon masters who follow these guidelines are likely to design more thrilling, satisfying challenges for their players. Their creations will take on new life. Floor plans will become tighter, leaner, and meaner. The rooms will lay themselves out, the exciting elements will rise from the pages and take on new dimensions. Details will appear in rooms that before would have been empty. Monsters will be chosen not simply for their ability to deal out damage but on whether they fit the dungeon's requirements. The effect will not be lost on the players.

The adventuring party will notice the dungeon as something more than a string of rooms and monsters. They will investigate for traps more cautiously. They will pick their spells more wisely. They will outfit their players more carefully. They will sense a cohesiveness, a meaning to the rooms they enter. And they will pay more attention to the details because they now carry significance. The final payoff will be for all players and DMs. Each succeeding adventure will become more exciting and more memorable as the dungeons rise above mediocrity to become actual crypts, ruins, and labyrinths.



Mathew Guss is an artist whose cartoons frequently appear in *DragonMirth*. He lives in West Valley City, Utah.



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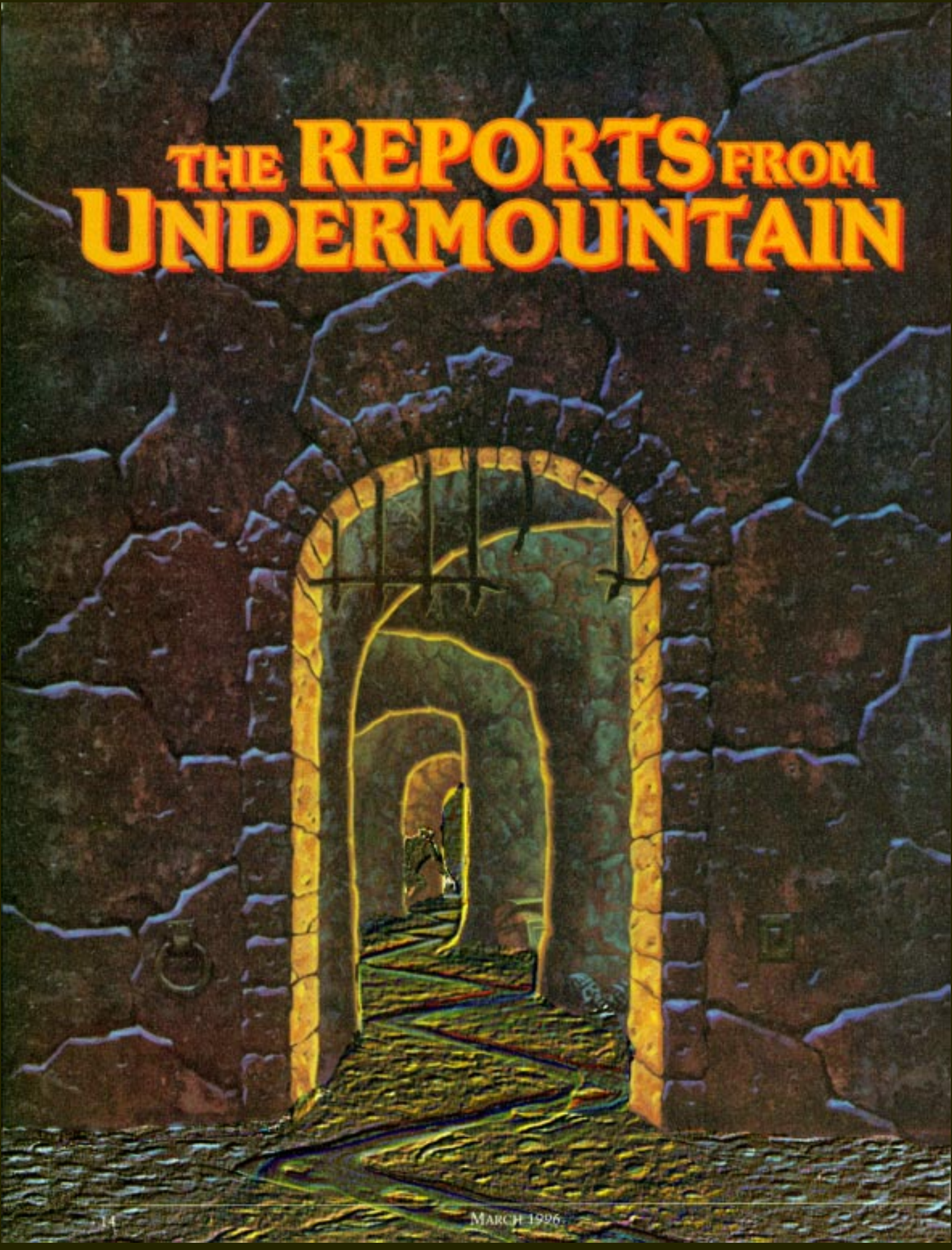
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# NOT for the WEAK at HEART



# THE REPORTS FROM UNDERMOUNTAIN





# Waterdeep's entrance to the Undermountain is still as busy as ever

by Steven E. Schend

illustrated by Brom, Randy Post, and Michael L. Scott

*According to the will of our honored Seenroas Halvinhar, Tymora's blessed high priestess of the Tower of luck, I, Brother Adama Miiralln<sup>1</sup>, have humbly set down an account of the activities, news, and general goings-on within the Yawning Portal and Undermountain, during the month of Eleint, in the Year of the Banner (336 NR). Some of the information precedes this time period but is necessary for these reports.*

## The Portal's Staff

New, permanent members have been added to the staff at the Yawning Portal. Two young boys by the names of Harel<sup>2</sup> and Tymos<sup>3</sup> have entered Durnan's employ as stablehands, and they have proven their worth as able messengers and errand boys for the guests of the inn as well. Both Tethyran by birth, they arrived in the company of one Mather Ukkhemn<sup>4</sup>, an arrogant Tethyran merchant who stayed at the inn two months back. Tymora smiled upon the lads that day, since, as rumor has it, the innkeeper Durnan was once a slave and abhors the practice with a cold fury. Despite assurances by Mather that they were his servants by choice, the boys' scared looks and scars communicated otherwise to Durnan and many patrons. Durnan hired them away and had the merchant removed from the city as a slaver. Harel and Tymos, both 13 years of age, are now among the most loyal of Durnan's workers.

Another new employee is the former adventurer Jhaax Dolbruin<sup>5</sup>, once called "Bladed Jhaax" and revered as an expert at wielding any type of bardiche or axe. On a recent expedition within the Ardeep Forest, he ran afoul of tomb-robbers. Though he brought them all to the low deaths they deserved for plundering sacred ground, he lost his left hand to a desperately-

wielded vorpal blade. Tymora may have blessed him with his life that day, but she also left him without the means to continue his chosen role of warrior. He signed on with Durnan nine months ago and he has proved an efficient barkeep and, if necessary, bouncer despite his lost hand. The only outburst of anger any have seen over Jhaax's loss was vented on a half-orc rogue who jokingly called him "Lefty;" the insolent rogue was pitched headlong down the well and into Undermountain. Though he believes himself to be discreet and quiet, Jhaax is in love, and it is readily apparent that romance blooms between him and the innkeeper's comely daughter, the 17-year-old Tamsil.

## The Portal's Patrons

I, myself, have become the regular priest of Tymora assigned to this nocturnal duty. It is the will of Tymora that those who wish to try their luck among the dangerous Underhalls be watched over by one of her own. Therefore, it is my solemn duty (as it is of my beautiful colleague, Lamris Kholi<sup>6</sup>, during the day) to be present in the Yawning Portal's taproom from dusk 'til dawn to provide solace and aid to those who rise again from the depths of Undermountain. I have undertaken the task of recording the goings-on above and below the dry well that leads below, and I provide these reports to both my superiors among Tymora's clergy (as signs of her blessings) and to the Open Lord Piergeiron (as a courtesy and a service to keep him informed of any dangers occurring below).

Though his motives are a bit more mercenary than mine, Gnossos Valmar<sup>7</sup> is as frequent a patron of the Yawning Portal as I am. He is, by trade and admission, an odds-taker who man-

**1. Adama Miiralln** (human priest): P5 of Tymora; hp 17; C 16, W 16; AL CG. Adama is a naive, kindly young priest with aspirations toward a higher post within Tymora's clergy. Recently arrived in the City of Splendors from Arabel, he swiftly came to refute his former city's claim to being the seat of Tymoran worship. He sees as one of his career goals to prove that the Tower of Luck in Sea Ward should be considered Tymora's center of worship. While he provides for the risk-takers who enter and exit Undermountain, he is a person who trusts in luck implicitly and takes risks that would seemingly defy his normally-wise demeanor. He is also hopelessly in love with Lamris Kholi, the Tymoran priestess who attends the Yawning Portal during daytime hours.

**2. Harel** (0-level human): hp 2; D 16, W 14; AL LN. He is a soft-spoken Tethyran boy of 13 with tawny brown hair, a lop-sided smile which shows his missing front teeth, and a quiet nature. He is loyally devoted to both his rescuer, Durnan, and to his companion Tymos. He will not question anything either of these people says to him or asks him to do, which sometimes gets him into trouble, though he is starting to wonder about what his friend Tymos does.

**3. Tymos** (human thief): T1; hp 3; S 15, D 16, Ch 17; AL NE. Tymos is a greedy, conniving, vindictive little thief, but his disarming charm has many disbelieving what their instincts warn them about him. While he is quite grateful for having been freed from bondage by Durnan, he returns his thanks by working for him and not stealing from the inn's take (as of yet). At night, Tymos has taken to pickpocketing and has attracted the notice of other thieves in Dock Ward. He has yet to be caught by the Guard or by Durnan, since Harel covers well for him. Durnan suspects what is about, but he waits for one boy or the other to come forward or to trip up.

**4. Mather Ukkhemn** (0-level human): hp 2; I 16; AL CE. He is a Tethyran merchant and member of the Knights of the Shield. Mather works for Lord Hlune of Tethyr, one of the senior

Knights. He is a notorious slaver, a fact commonly known by the Lords thanks to Sammereza Sulphontis, and Durnan liberated the boys from this fat, egotistical man's servitude to expedite the excuse to eject him from the city.

**5. Jhaax Dolbruin** (human ranger): R7; hp 39; S 18/09, C 15, Ch 14; AL NC. Jhaax is a Waterdhavian ranger who worships Mielikki and Tymora. Jhaax has only one hand. Despite the loss of his left hand, he is still a strong and capable fighter; however, his former special weapon (a *bardiche* +1 *flametongue*) is useless to him. He keeps the *vorpal short sword* that cost him his hand, and he has a hand axe on his belt at all times. He is quite skilled at throwing the axe full-length across the taproom and disabling any troublemakers. While he is twice her age, Jhaax is truly in love with Tamsil and only waits to save enough money for him to buy his own tavern and marry her. Durnan is waiting for the same moment before he will recruit Jhaax to the Red Sashes.

**6. Lamris Kholi** (female human priest): P5; hp 23; C 18, D 15, W 15; AL CC. Lamris, a specialty priest of Tymora, is originally from Llorrh. She is a strikingly beautiful woman of 20 years, with a vivacious and unpredictable nature. Though she is quite loyal and true to her calling as a priestess of Tymora, her attitude toward people is rather irresponsible and capricious. She is aware of Adama's feelings toward her, but she treats their budding relationship as only a fling. She wishes to return to Llorrh to help her family and old friends escape from the Zhent-controlled town, but she cannot do it alone, and she is beginning to realize that her fickle demeanor has not made her many steadfast friends on whom she can count for help.

**7. Gnossos Valmar** (male gnome thief): T4; hp 11; I 16, D6, Ch 16; AL NG. Gnossos is a worshiper of Tymora and Selune. Gnossos is a killed odds-taker who rarely makes a bad wager. His odds range from 10:1 sp against the survival of novice (levels 1-4)



ages a healthy majority of the bets and wagers placed in the taproom over the fates of Undermountain's delvers. While I first believed him to be untrustworthy due to his chosen profession, the cane-wielding gnome has proven me wrong. In fact, he is quite pious in his own way: A large percentage (though I confess to not knowing his full intake of gold) of his profits from the wagers are donated to me for the Tower of Luck at the end of each tenday.

A regular patron of late has been a mysterious, blue-cloaked mage of some means. He wears rich clothes of velvets and silks, and his cloak is a deep mid-night-blue with a cowl sewn into it that he constantly keeps drawn over his face. He simply sits quietly in a corner booth, intently watching any who appear out of the dry well. In some small attempts to gain information about him, I found that no one knew his full name, that he paid for a full month's stay in advance and in Cormyr gold, and that he simply told people that he is looking for someone who owes a great deal to Cormyr. His skin tone and accent mark him as a Calishite native.<sup>8</sup>

## Waterdeep's Bravest & Boldest

I now must record those names of whom Tymora must watch over in the dark, dank halls of Halaster's dungeon beneath fair Waterdeep. A number of these folk have exited Undermountain via the Yawning Portal and have asked for my aid; for these, I have noted what services we have rendered and the Tower of Luck shall expect their attendance for at least the next tenday's services.

adventurers entering Undermountain to three harbor moons (150 gp) to 10 gold on the safe return of veterans (such as Duman or Mirt). He typically clears 5d12 gp per night and donates as much as half of that amount to the Tower of Luck each tenday. Due to his weak left leg, he was never an active adventurer, but he is quite the effective spy. He works as an informant, unknowingly selling information to the Red Sashes (through Duman) and the Lords of the City (through his current paramour, Kyliia).

8. The azure-hooded mage (whose name is Ali ibn-Dakimh) is an expatriate Calishite who relocated to Cormyr and joined the War Wizards. He is a worshiper of Achanatyr (southern aspect of Tyr), Azuth, and Mystra. He is on an job for Vangerdahast, the court wizard, to watch for a number of fugitives from Cormyr justice, including three thieves guilty of assassinating a number of nobles in Cormyr. Rumors traced the guilty parties to Waterdeep and Undermountain, where they hoped to hide out for a time in Skullport.

**Ali ibn-Dakimh** (male human): AL LG; W7 (enchanter); hp 19; I 17, W 16.

9. The Company of the Sundered Orc is a relatively new adventuring company out of Daggerford. They

• The Company of the Sundered Orc<sup>9</sup> entered Undermountain on the 2nd day of Eleint shortly after sundown. Their plans were to venture down to the second level of the dungeon and track down an alleged treasure horde once viewed by Essimuth Lanys, a long-winded equipment merchant of South Ward's Adventurers' Quarter. As of the last day of the month, these young heroes have not returned.

• Mask's Conscript<sup>10</sup>: This quintet entered the Yawning Portal just before dawn on the 12th day of Eleint and insisted on being lowered into the dungeon immediately. Their reasons for entering the Halls Below were not given directly, though they boasted that they would be doing the Lords of the City a favor if successful in their tasks. They returned on the evening of the 21st, none the worse for wear, and they paid off their return fees of five gold with three taols that looked at least 200 years old!

• Five of the Deep Delvers<sup>11</sup> entered Halaster's Halls once again on the 17th day of Eleint, intent on finding the long-lost fortunes of Allumar Zeth, a former Guildmaster of the city who hid his treasure within Undermountain more than a century ago rather than lose it in the Guildwars. All six returned, but they did not find any trace of Zeth's treasure. They did uncover a warm, partially-swamped area that contained a temple to some unnamed lizard god (either on Level Four or Six, depending on conflicting stories). Shauban Zulpair and Horth Hunabar were nearly slain by lizardmen attendants at this temple, but they managed to escape. In exchange for healing spells and restorative draughts, the two young lords paid me with four large dia-

monds, each the size of my knuckles, and a magical mace.

• The evening of Eleint 19 started ominously with the return of Jhassalan "of the Lightning," the sole survivor of the Guild of the Just, a company of seven wizards and warriors. The septet apparently entered Undermountain on the 4th day of Eleasias, seeking to destroy the alleged temple to Loviatar that was recently established in the northern quarter of the dungeon's first level. Jhassalan escaped due to the apparent aid of Halaster's mad apprentice Muiral the Misshapen!<sup>12</sup> The mage was in need of healing and paid for these services with his generous donation of a *ring of warmth*.

• The 30th of Eleint tested even my faith in the caprices of the goddess as I saw the most unique persons seeking Tymora's aid in relieving their suffering. Honorable Mistress Halvinhar, I scarcely believed my own eyes as three haggard and cloaked adventurers disembarked from the well (one carried by the other two) and rushed quickly to a back room. After looking at a pendant worn by the prone figure, Durnan swiftly requested my services to attend to them, as I earnestly did. When the door latched behind me, I found myself looking upon two badly-wounded human men in horribly rent chain mail and a prone female drow lying dead on the room's only table! Though reluctant, I was assured by Durnan that these folk — especially the woman — deserved Tymora's favors. I *resurrected* the drow by means of my assigned *rod of resurrection* and healed the men with normal *healing* spells. Despite all I have heard about the dark

took their company name from a small band of orc raiders that they slew along their way to the City of Splendors, having left Daggerford without a title. The quintet are **Lorax "the Slayer"** (human F2), the comely **Wynara Rulmac** (human W1), **Pelops "Shadowstriker"** (halfling T3), a priest of Ilmater named **Jared Rheloph "the pious"** (human P1), and **Cassandra Rulmac** (half-elf F2/W1). As of the end of Eleint, the entire company has been captured by drow slavers on Level Two and are awaiting transport to Skullport.

10. Mask's Conscript is a seasoned group of spies and cutthroats out of Luskan. They have allegedly done work in the past for the Hosttower of the Arcane, some of Luskan's civic leaders, and anyone who can afford to hire them. Its members are leader **Thad Ruchel** (human T7, AL NE), **Wendyll Thintoworth** (half-elf T5/F4, AL CE), **Volmir** (half elf T5/W4, AL CN), **Hashak** (dwarf F6/T6, AL NE) and **Enris the Gray** (halfling T5, AL NE). Their task is to root out an alleged nest of doppelgangers within Undermountain's first level that recently tried infiltrating the Hosttower's newest batch of apprentices. Unfortunately, this group fell victim to the greater doppelgangers they were hunting, and their identities have now been absorbed by five Unseen members.

11. The Deep Delvers are young human nobles of Waterdeep who enter Undermountain for sport and excitement, as well as the chance to make names for themselves beyond their titular celebrity. The five members who entered the dungeon are: **Shauban Zulpair** (T5, AL CE), **Horth Hunabar** (FS, AL CE), **Dundald Gost** (F6, AL CG), **Morgunn Lathkule** (F5, AL CN), and **Myrnd Gundwynd** (barbarian F5, AL CN). The diamonds are each worth 500 gp and the mace is a *mace +1*.

12. Jhassalan "of the Lightning" (LG human, 7th-level invoker) is a native of Silvermoon; his title comes from his penchant for electrical spells and a lightning-shaped shock of blond hair that runs from his temple and over his brown-haired scalp. The Guild of the Just entered the House of Pain on Eleint 20 and had successfully freed a number of captives when they were ambushed by 30 of Loviatar's faithful. Jhassalan managed to escape capture with an *invisibility* spell, but he was still surrounded. He was saved for unknown reasons by Muiral, who appeared out of thin air and began attacking the priests and temple guards with his scorpion's tail, sword, and spells. Jhassalan managed to slip away in the confusion. After a short convalescence and study, he intends to hire good-aligned allies to return with him to the dungeon and help free his friends.





elves, the woman seemed quite polite and virtuous. Her grasp of our common tongue was halting, but her thanks were sincere and earnest. Though Durnan and the others asked that I not discuss their presence with others in the Portal, I was given leave to mention the incident to you, my superiors, and to present you with their gift in exchange for Tymora's aid: a carved statuette of solid mithril depicting a beautiful nude elf woman dancing about a flame.<sup>13</sup>

• There were also 19 other adventurers who entered the dungeon by way of the Yawning Portal's well, but these folk declined to leave their names with me. As it is with many who rely on Tymora's blessings to see them through, they chose not to be well-known unless they

should return triumphant to the surface. As of the last day of Eleint, none of these adventurers have returned to Durnan's taproom to become known veterans of the Underhalls.

## Undermountain's Power Players

From reports and discussions with those returning from Undermountain over the past two months, a number of groups have coalesced into true organized powers to be reckoned with. If talk of these groups continues on a regular basis, further information can be given to the Guard so contingents of armed soldiers can be sent into the dungeon to reduce the numbers of enemies organized against Waterdeep's Lords.

• A large contingent of drow have returned to Undermountain and have established a hold in a ruined temple area on Level Two. They number somewhere between 20 and 50 heads, but luckily it seems to be primarily a scouting party of male warriors with only one unnamed priestess as its leader.<sup>14</sup>

• Some unknown forces are clashing somewhere along the underground river that starts in the third level of the dungeon. Those that talked about this area and the conflict were definitely not telling the whole story, but they would mention that the forces involved were a good temple under attack by some inhuman monstrosities, and that the temple was having trouble resisting the assaults.<sup>15</sup>

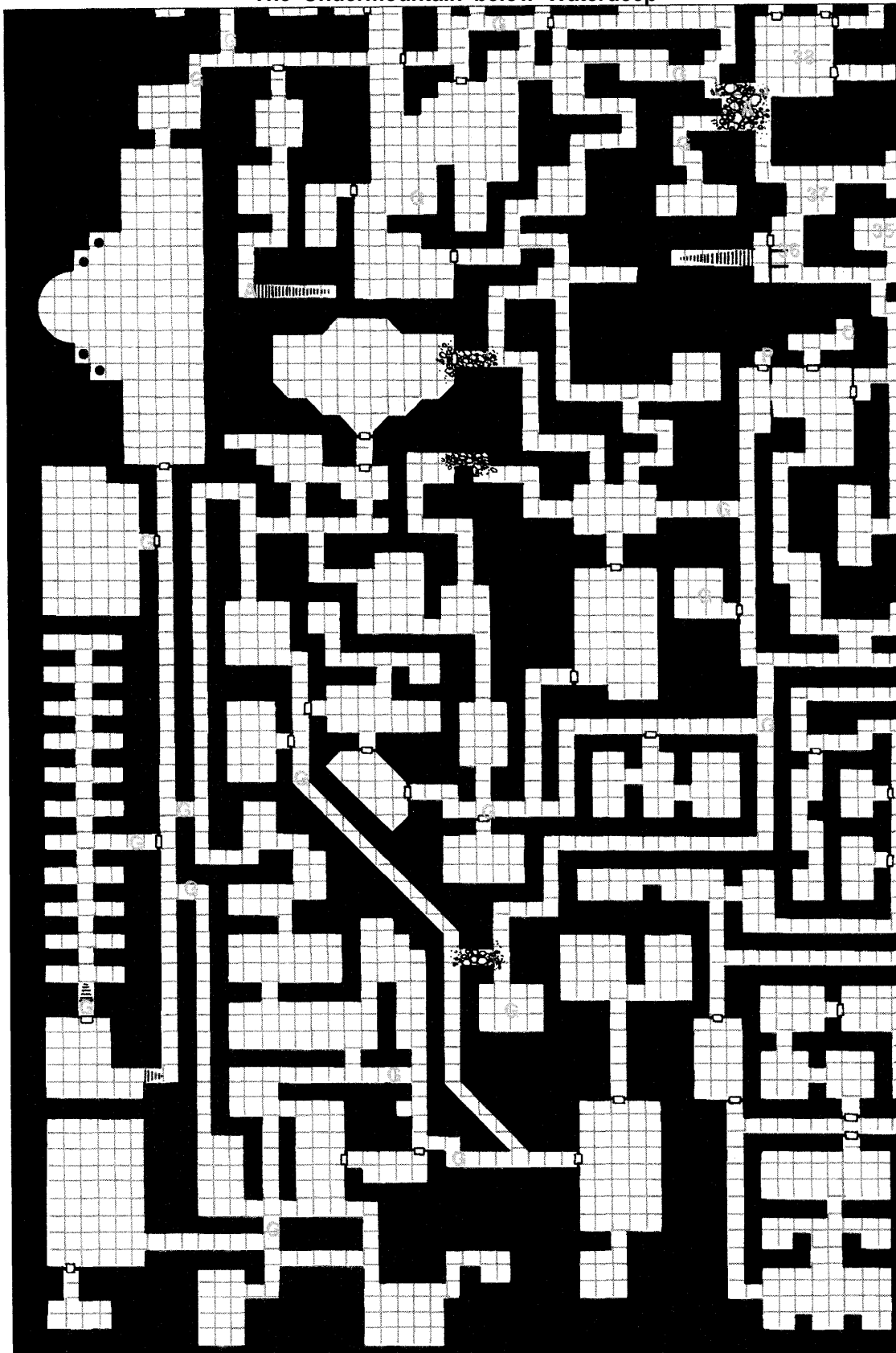
13. **Phaergos** (human, F6, AL LG), from Baldur's Gate, **Yulm Matyris** (half-elf, F8, AL CG), and a priestess of Eilistraee named **Dark Maiden Aerial Faenrya** (drow, P5 AL NG) have fled the fighting at the Promenade of Eilistraee to seek aid from Laeral Silverhand and any others in Waterdeep they believe they can trust. They were sent on this mission by Elkantar Iluim, the Right Hand of the Lady and Primary Protector of the Song. The 1'-tall mithril statuette given to Adama is easily worth 1,500 gp, and the trio carries four more to be given as gifts to worthy allies willing to join their cause. After they were healed, the trio was escorted out of the inn via underground passages to Blackstaff Tower.

14. Room #47 of Level Two on the map in on the original *Ruins of Undermountain* setting — a former lair of

leucrotta — has been conquered and has become the barracks for a drow hunting party 36 members strong. Thirty-two of these drow are male warriors of levels 2-5 (1d4 +1) as in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome. The remaining four drow are women, three priestesses of Lolth of levels 3-8 (1d6+2) and the leader of this slavers' group, the revered **Ahlysaaria Yril' Lysaen** (P5), priestess of Lolth. This group is instructed to establish a presence within Undermountain's upper halls and try and rebuild a long-sundered slaving route from the surface to the Underdark, specifically to the drow city of Karsoluthiyl (located miles beneath and to the west of the nearest surface city of Baldur's Gate). They are holding their own against adventurers and monsters alike, awaiting the return of eight of their members with reinforcements from Karsoluthiyl.

15. The Promenade of Eilistraee, the drow temple north and east of Skullport along the River Sargauth, is under siege by the Cult of Chaunadar. The temple's defenders have not lost any members, thanks to the healing abilities of the priestesses, but the months-long offense is wearing down all within. The Cult has amassed 12 ghaunadan commanders that appear to be controlling somewhere around 50 semi-intelligent puddings and oozes in attacks against the temple from the northern and eastern caverns. The slimes have burned through the rock and have nearly overtaken the Hall of Healing (the northernmost cavern) twice in the past month. No help is available from Skullport for the temple, so Qilue and her consort consented to sending a party to the surface for aid from her sister, Laeral Silverhand.

### The Undermountain below Waterdeep



This map, supplied by an adventurer who wishes to remain anonymous, corresponds to a section of the first level of the map that was published previously in the original *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set. On it, the adventurer noted several new cave-ins that render previously familiar corridors impassable and make maneuvering in the Undermountain a less-than-certain affair. She also marked several places (here shown by a "G") where she observed guards to be regularly posted or on patrol. See the footnotes of the article for more information.



- Ground holy to Loviatar has been established among the long-ruined passages on Level One. The House of Pain, as its faithful call it, contains a huge amphitheater, numerous cells for adjutants and sacrifices alike, and vaults for the order's weapons and treasures. One account directly places the temple as a series of halls and rooms in the north-western quadrant of Level One.<sup>16</sup>

- A group of undead Waterdeep Guard and Watch members have established a pattern of regular patrols within the central western passages on Level Two of the dungeon. They do not attack without provocation and often let native Waterdhavian adventurers pass unmo-  
lested. They are simply patrolling the dungeon to help diminish its monstrous population. Accounts vary on the size of the group, but patrols number no less than six and rarely more than 12 per encounter.<sup>17</sup>

## Transforming the Underhalls

While many changes and alterations happen to the lower levels of Halaster's domain and go unnoticed, the upper halls (levels 1-3) have apparently remained relatively stable for the past century (or so I am given to assume from various and sundry accounts). Within the past year, however, a number of physical revisions to the dungeon have been made and accounted for by various delvers below. In addition, a small amount of new exits and entrances have become apparent in this time as well,

and these are noted here. While these are not of utmost import to the Tower of Luck, this information was recorded for the use of Lord Piergeiron and his Guard commanders, should they need to enter the peril-fraught passages

- Various passages have been blocked by rockfalls on Level One. Speculation points to the priests of the House of Pain limiting the access to and from their temple. A map has been provided of the blocked halls and where Loviatar's worshipers post guards to maintain control of the north end of Undermountain's Level One.

- A large temple area on Level Two has apparently become the center of a bizarre magical effect. The temple and all adjacent rooms are filled by a howling blizzard. Sigils etched in the floor before the north and south doors and the western archway show Auril's mark. The wind echoes around the surrounding halls, but the snow is limited to the confines marked by the sigils.<sup>18</sup>

- A halfling who neglected to identify himself to me came running into the Portal on the night of Eleint 24 to proclaim his knowledge of a new exit from Undermountain. Apparently, he was scouting ahead of his compatriots after they escaped some drow slavers by diving into a subterranean river and letting the current take them to some caverns along the river. He squeezed into a small niche he found along a tunnel, curious about a strange whistling sound. He was immediately shrunk to the size of a doll

16. On the Level One map for Undermountain, the House of Pain order controls all the areas north of the stairs leading down to Level Two (marked with an "A") and patrols the majority of the halls west of said stairs down to Room #33. See the map at left for guard postings; all posts and patrols are at least four fighters (levels 1d3 +1) and two priests of Loviatar (levels 1d4).

17. These undead patrolmen are all curst (see the *City of Splendors* box or the 1995 *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual*, transformed during the Time of Troubles and assigned this detached duty within Undermountain soon afterward. Despite the relative size of the individual watches, the whole band has seven patrols roaming the Underhalls at all times and it numbers 42 members all told. They are as CN fighters of levels 2-5 (1d4+1), with each patrol having a guard captain of level 6 or above (1d4+5).

18. This area of *wizard weather* creates a perpetual blizzard within the large temple and adjacent rooms to the south of Room #45 on Level Two. The same mysterious wizards or priests of Auril that established the blizzard (with Halaster's blessing, it seems) also placed a *teleport* within the room that brings a remorhaz, frost giant, or white dragon into the main temple whenever one of the sigils is crossed by a living being.

19. The niche exists along one of the slim tunnels south of the Sargauth on the Level Three-South map from the *Ruins of Undermountain* box. If the river is fol-

lowed east to a cavern with five pillars of stone, the player character must enter that cavern and take the eastern arc past the cavern and along further east. At the tunnel's apogee, there is a 2'-wide niche that whistles with an updraft. Once entered, the niche's magic shrinks anyone who enters it to four inches in height and whisks them up in a reverse gravity effect through a small fissure that leads up to a small hillock overlooking New Olamn's southernmost building. There is no apparent way to cancel this magic from either end, and all attempts to send anything back down to Undermountain through this passage simply fail.

20. The mysterious gentleman who gave out this secret (and indirectly gave the information to Piergeiron and the Lords of the City) was a magically disguised Danilo Thann acting on Khelben's orders. This illusory wall on the North Ward end of the City of the Dead is a long-standing secret of the Harpers, who use it to swiftly enter the dungeon and retrieve any lost comrades. The *teleport* deposits travelers into Room #33 (The Deep Well) without harm. Its magic is constantly operating, but unbeknownst to all but Master Harpers and Danilo, this *teleport* also acts as a two-way entrance/exit during the nights of the full moon, allowing swift egress from Undermountain. The Guild of the Just used this to enter the dungeon, but Jhassalan exited via the Portal. Use of this portal should be kept to a minimum by the diligent guards atop the watchtower keeping anyone from inching out along the one-foot-wide ledge that leads to the wall portal.

and whisked swiftly upon a strong updraft along a rough, twisting tunnel. His flight finally ended about half-way up the eastern slope of Mount Waterdeep, overlooking New Olamn.<sup>19</sup>

- The most recently discovered entrance to Undermountain was reported to me by Jhassalan "of the Lightning," formerly of the Guild of the Just. He and his compatriots bought a parchment from an unidentified person in lower Castle Ward ("though he was dressed as a noble gentleman") who gave them the portal's location. Apparently, an eastern section of the wall surrounding the City of the Dead is illusory and *teleports* those who touch it into Undermountain's first level. The illusory wall *teleport* rests 10 paces along the cliff from the watchtower that fronts on the Beaconmarch.<sup>20</sup>



Steven Schend is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc. He is a big fan of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS®* setting.

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# The Dragon's Bestiary

## Monsters of the Underdark

The strange, harsh environment of underground caverns and tunnels breeds nightmares—creatures that hardly seem credible when described by firelight at a tavern lurk deep in the shadows of the Night Below.

This article contains a bestiary of 10 creatures that live in total darkness, some based on natural creatures, some original and fantastical. The main requirement for any creature of the Underdark, of course, is simply that it be wondrously strange and yet can plausibly survive the rigors of a very limited environment.

by Wolfgang Baur

illustrated by Mike L. Scott





# Bainligor

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Rare
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Tribal
<b>ACTIVITY/CYCLE:</b>	Night
<b>DIET:</b>	Omnivore
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	very (11-12)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	Q (x10)
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral Evil

<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	4-400
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	7
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	6, Jump 9
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	2+1 to 10+9
<b>THACO:</b>	2+1 (young) 4+3 (adult) 6+5 (middle-aged) 8+7 (elderly) 10+9 (undead)
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS</b>	2
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	1-4/1-4 to 1-10/1-10
<b>SPECIAL ATTACKS:</b>	Echolocation, stun
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Dodge missiles
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	Standard
<b>SIZE:</b>	M (3'-6' tall)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Unsteady (5-7)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	2+1 HD: 270 4+3 HD: 650 6+5 HD: 975 8+7 HD: 2,000 10+9 HD: 5,000

The bainligor are small, flightless bat-people, a primitive tribal culture found in the upper reaches of the underdark, where they subsist almost entirely on insects, spiders, rothe, and edible fungi such as fireweed (q.v.). They hunt in darkness using echolocation, just as their bat ancestors, and so they are completely immune to *darkness 15' radius*, *invisibility*, and *blindness* spells, and visual illusions of all kinds.

In appearance, bainligor are considered hideous by even the most charitable viewers. Their ears are huge and pointed, their ridged snouts and elaborately sculpted facial features resembling those of bats.

Though bainligor can speak Underdark trade common, most of their speech is too high-pitched for others to hear. If necessary, they can make an effort to speak in a low enough voice to be heard by other races; even then, their voices resemble high-pitched squeaks. As a result, the bainligor rarely speak with outsiders and carry on little trade with other races. Most of what they have is of little value; bone and stone tools, tanned hides, and small quantities of food are their usual treasures.

The cries of a rampaging pack of bainligor are inaudible to the ears of most humans and demi-humans, but dogs and cats often warn against such attacks; they can hear the bainligor coming.

**Combat:** In battle, the bainligor attack *en masse*, hoping to pull prey down quickly. The smallest attack for 1-4 hp damage with claws and the same from their needle-like teeth; larger bainligor attack for 1-6/1-6, 2-7/2-7, 1-10/1-10 for chieftains, and eventually 1-12/1-12 for the Revered and swarm watchers. *Deafness* spells blind the bainligor, reducing all their attacks by -4.



All bainligor can turn their echolocation chirps into a weapon capable of stunning prey. Once per hour, any bainligor can summon a massive burst of ultrasonic sound, sound that shocks and hammers flesh like a gigantic fist. The attack takes the place of bite and claw damage, and it inflicts 1-6 hp damage per Hit Die of the bainligor. Unless the target makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation, the attack also leaves the victim unable to do more than defend himself (at a -2 penalty to AC and no Dexterity bonus) for 1d4 rounds. If the saving throw fails by 8 or more, the victim is also permanently deafened.

Finally, bainligor can dodge all missiles to varying degrees; when involved in melee, their AC against such attacks is six places higher (AC 1). When walking and concentrating on such attacks, they can automatically dodge any missile. This protection does not apply to all magical attacks, only those that require an attack roll.

**Habitat/Society:** Bainligor society is based on reverence of the elderly; young bainligor always defer to the commands of the old. As they age, the claws and teeth of the bainligor are magically strengthened by growth spurts; As a result of these magical periods of growth, the bat-people continue to grow larger throughout their lives. Eventually, the eldest of the bainligor leave their tribes, compelled by an inner voice to seek out dry, empty caverns where their bodies are transformed for the last time. Once they return from their seclusion, they are undead creatures of 10+9 hit-dice, called Revered Ones. These creatures are chieftains, war leaders, priests, and guardians to their descendants; the strongest of them may rule a swarm of bainligor for generations. A few of the undead (about 10%) become spellcasters after they make the transition to unlife; all of their followers are fanatically loyal to them.

**Ecology:** The bainligor are nomads and scavengers, feasting on insects, detritus, and even rotting flesh if necessary. Rather than a source of shame, this scavenging, wandering existence is a source of pride among the bainligor, for they believe that they can survive anywhere, on anything, whereas others are tied to the earth by their possessions, their cities, and their weakness for special foods. Eating noxious foods is a source of many bainligor boasts.

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Tales are told of the Deep Tribes, those who starved until they were reduced to nothing but dozens of the Revered, who still hunt in great swarms, not for nourishment but for the joy of their great strength and the fear they cause in others. These are likely nothing more than myths told to bainligor young, for such sightings have never been confirmed by sages or savants of the underdark races.

## **The Revered**

Elder bainligor can transform other creatures into undead. This requires a successful attack roll, and entitles the victim to a saving throw against death magic at +1/level or HD of the target (bainligor are not entitled to a saving throw). The creature becomes a zombie unless it is a bainligor, which becomes a Revered One with the HD it had in life. The Revered cannot use this ability more than once per month and will not do so to their own kind unless they fear the tribe is in danger of starvation, overcrowding, or death by poison gas or drowning.



# Beetle, Scarab, Giant

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Uncommon
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Mated pairs
<b>ACTIVITY CYCLE:</b>	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	Omnivore
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Low (5-7)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	None
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral Good

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<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1-4
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	3
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	6, Burrow 1, Jump 12
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	6
<b>THACO:</b>	9
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS:</b>	1
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	2-12
<b>SPECIAL ATTACK:</b>	Flare
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Jump
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	Standard
<b>SIZE:</b>	L (12' long)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Elite (14)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	420

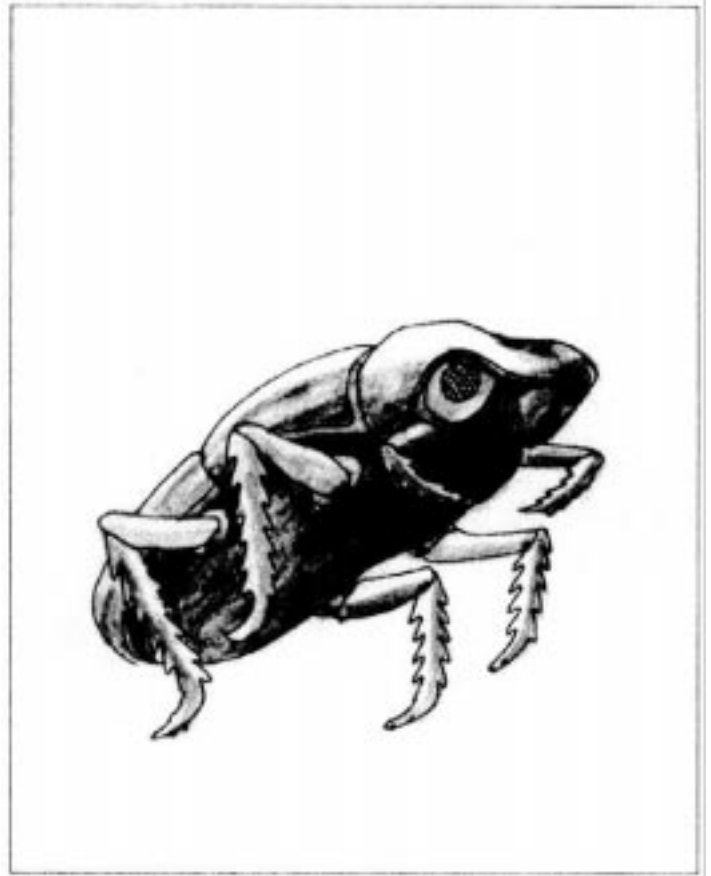
Scarab beetles are black- or brown-shelled beetles, familiar to many as the beetles adorning Egyptian amulets. In the underdark, they survive on bat guano and cave crickets, but they are not averse to a change of diet. They consider all smaller creatures potential prey.

**Combat:** Scarab beetles are generally reclusive creatures, scuttling along with their balls of dung in the center of great caverns, gathering food and avoiding predators as best they can. Their vestigial wings allow them to fly short distances up to 120 yards at a time, with a loud clacking, buzzing flight. They always seek to flee first if attacked; these jump-flights often take them up to cavern ledges.

When pressed, scarab beetles can ignite a special magical flare beneath their vestigial wings, creating a light brighter than normal sunlight that illuminates everything within 150', dispels any magical shadows or darkness within 10', and inflicts 1d6 hp damage/round to the undead or creatures made of shadow, such as shadow fiends, slow shadows, and darkness elementals. The flare lasts for one round per HD of the giant beetle and does not interfere with its normal mandible attacks. However, the scarab beetle cannot fly while its flare shines, because the wings must be used to generate the intense light.

**Habitat/Society:** Scarab beetles are often sought after by sun god cults and followers of the Egyptian pantheon, who believe they are holy animals and symbols of rebirth. In general, they have no complex societies and simply prefer areas containing great quantities of dung, which they fashion into ball-shaped containers for eggs, and which they use to build their elaborate tunnel-nests.

The scarab beetle's nest are simple, circular tunnels about 4' in diameter, just wide enough for the beetles to pass through, but not big enough for larger predators. The tunnels are packed with balls of dung and stink abominably, but they are otherwise as dry as the surrounding stone. Any treasures the beetles have will be embedded into the tunnel walls.



**Ecology:** In addition to their role as scavengers, scarab beetles keep the number of undead in the underdark down. An instinct which some believe was implanted in the species by the sun god Ra drives scarab beetles to swarm to the attack whenever confronted by undead of any kind; their sunlight and their powerful jaws are capable of destroying and then recycling everything from skeletons to vampires.

# Carapace

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Very rare
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Solitary
<b>ACTIVITY/CYCLE:</b>	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	Fungivore
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Non- (0)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	None
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral

<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	10
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	1
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	1+1 to 2+2
<b>THAC0:</b>	19-17
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS:</b>	1
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	1-2
<b>SPECIAL ATTACKS:</b>	Possession
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Create armor, immune to fire
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	Standard
<b>SIZE:</b>	S (1' diameter)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Unreliable (2-4)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	175

Also called the coffin shell creature, a carapace is an aggressive form of fungus that can adapt itself to living on almost any vertebrate creature, from reptiles to mammals to fish. It cannot attach itself to invertebrates, such as insects, spiders, or octopi.

**Combat:** Whenever a carapace successfully strikes a target, or is struck by the unprotected flesh of a predator or attacker, it creates a sticky, gluey bond between the two creatures. If allowed to harden, this bond soon becomes permanent, and the carapace begins spread its mass out over its hosts skin. This bonded, protective mass then hardens the host's skin; in this form, the carapace adds 2 places to the host creature's Armor Class (for instance, an AC 6 purple worm would become AC 4). It can cover any size creature given enough time, since it transforms some of the host's own flesh as well as spreading its own. This covering process takes a single day for size T creatures, two days for S creatures, four days for M creatures, a week to 10 days for size L, at least two weeks for size H, and up to a month for G creatures; the host permanently loses one point of Constitution (one HD for monsters).

Once the host is entirely covered, the carapace cannot be removed without further damage to the host's body; attempts to remove it with fire, knives, or healing spells only inflict damage to the host. After the carapace covers the entire skin of the host, the host body becomes noticeably thinner and paler; this is when many creature's companions first notice any change. However, at the same time, the more integrated carapace can now offer its host even greater benefits; the carapace can regenerate its host at a rate of 1 hp/round in exchange for up to a day in exchange for another point of Constitution. It can also absorb all poisons and mental attacks, making the host immune to all poisons, psionic attacks, and enchantment/charm spells.

Finally, the carapace influences the host's alignment over time, as it subsumes the host's spinal and brain tissue. As its nervous system and that of the host become more and more intertwined, the host's alignment shifts irreversibly to neutral, though the victim's lawful/chaotic tendencies are unaffected.



**Ecology:** The carapace is a pure symbiont, thought to have been created by a slime-lord of the tanar'ri long ago. Only the most desperate of the Underdark races will even don one of the creatures, but slave-warriors among the derro and aboleth are sometimes forced to become hosts to the foul creatures.

When not attached to a host, the carapace can subsist for months on a diet of less-dangerous fungus and slime-molds.



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# Elemental, Darkness

**CLIMATE/TERRAIN:** Any dark  
**FREQUENCY:** Very rare  
**ORGANIZATION:** Solitary  
**ACTIVITY/CYCLE:** Night  
**DIET:** Darkness  
**INTELLIGENCE:** Low (5-7)  
**TREASURE:** Nil  
**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral Evil

---

**NO. APPEARING:** 1  
**ARMOR CLASS:** 2  
**MOVEMENT:** 15  
**HIT DICE:** 8, 12 or 16  
**THACO:** 8 HD: 13  
12 HD: 9  
16 HD: 5  
**NO. OF ATTACKS:** 1  
**DAMAGE/ATTACK:** 4-24  
**SPECIAL ATTACKS:** Chill, blind  
**SPECIAL DEFENSES:** +2 or better weapon to hit, hide  
**MAGIC RESISTANCE:** Standard  
**SIZE:** L to H (8'-16' tall)  
**MORALE:** 8 or 12 HD: Champion (15-16)  
16 HD: Fanatic (17)  
**XP VALUE:** 8 HD: 3,000  
12 HD: 7,000  
16 HD: 11,000

Summoned by elder priests of dark gods, darkness elementals are creatures of pure negative life energy, the distilled spirit of undeath, decay, and the night. They can be summoned only at midnight or deep underground, and few stay for more than a single night.

**Combat:** A darkness elemental can chill a target creature's spirit by attacking it through its shadow; this constitutes an attack against AC 10, plus any Dexterity bonus if the target creature is aware of what the elemental is attempting. A successful hit allows the darkness elemental to blind its target by wrapping it in its own shadow, unless a saving throw vs. petrification (at -6) is successful. This blindness can be removed only by a casting a *cure blindness* or *heal* spell, or by exposing the victim to full sunlight.

Darkness elementals suffer damage from magical light spells and healing spells of all kinds; when contacted by one of these spells, an explosion occurs as the negative and positive magical energies destroy each other, inflicting 1d8 hp damage to the elemental for each level of the spell. Creatures within 10' of the explosion suffer 1 hp damage per level of the spell, half if a saving throw vs. breath weapon is successful.

Darkness elementals can automatically Hide in Shadows; they can hide from infravision as well, becoming effectively invisible as long as they remain immobile. As soon as they move at more than a creeping shadow's pace (a Movement Rate of 1), they become obvious to any onlooker.

**Habitat/Society:** Because the plane of elemental Darkness is so inhospitable to all forms of life, little is known about the society of these rare elementals. It is thought to mirror that of the better-known elementals of fire, water, air, and earth, that is, a some-



what Arabian style caliphate or sultanate, with a more-or-less feudal social structure.

However, the evil alignment of darkness elementals may indicate a different social structure entirely, perhaps one ruled by a Prince of Elemental Evil or a lord of the yugoloth. The dao seem to have some sort of agreement with these elementals; the details are unclear, but the two races have worked together on raids deep underground and on the elemental plane of Earth.

**Ecology:** Darkness elementals are the enemies of all creatures of light and life; they seek to destroy both at every opportunity. Undead creatures are either their allies or their servants; the relationship between the two is unclear. Like other elementals, they are not natural creatures and neither require anything from nor contribute anything to the natural ecosystem.

# Fireweed

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark or tropical
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Rare
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	None
<b>ACTIVITY/CYCLE:</b>	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	Heat
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Non- (0)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	None
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral

<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	7
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	0
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	1 to 9
<b>THACO:</b>	N/A
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS:</b>	1
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	1-4
<b>SPECIAL ATTACKS:</b>	None
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Absorb fire
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	Standard
<b>SIZE:</b>	S to L (1'-8' tall)
<b>MORALE:</b>	N/A
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	N/A

This strange, heat-absorbing plant grows in sections of the Underdark that even fungi find too harsh to survive. While it is not a threat to most adventuring parties, it can change the terrain, making volcanic regions survivable. It can also turn the normally lifeless stretches of the underdark into relatively fertile regions, simply by converting heat into food.

Fireweed is a black, spongy plant, without leaves but with constant branches; its overall structure resembles a gigantic Spanish moss. Its sap is a purplish-red.

**Combat:** Because fireweed thrives on heat of all kinds, it cannot be destroyed by fire, even magical fire; instead, fire makes it grow at an astounding, even magical rate, filling entire corridors or caverns if the heat is great enough. For each die of heat damage that fireweed absorbs, it grows another foot; constant sources of heat can quickly lead to the weed overrunning every bit of space for miles, creating a dark wooden jungle.

**Habitat/Society:** Fireweed grows in stands, much like scrub weeds and saplings on the surface. These stands are almost always a single genetic organism, reproducing by cloning into many hundreds or thousands of copies of the founding fireweed plant.

**Ecology:** The semi-magical strength of fireweed converts heat into food and foul toxins into breathable air. Its value to the creatures of the deep underdark is immense, and they treat it with the respect it deserves. Surface-dwellers who hack down stands of the useful plant are often punished by Underdark dwellers who witness the crime.



# Glouras

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Very Rare
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Solitary
<b>ACTIVITY/CYCLE:</b>	Any
<b>DIET:</b>	Omnivore
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Exceptional (15)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	R, U
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Neutral

<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1-2
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	4
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	16, Fly 3, Burrow 3
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	4+4
<b>THAC0:</b>	15
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS</b>	1 (claws)
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	1-8
<b>SPECIAL ATTACKS:</b>	Sing-song drone
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Servants
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	20%
<b>SIZE:</b>	S (3' tall, 8' wingspan)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Average (10)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	650

The glouras is a rare faerie creature of the underdark, a gray-skinned humanoid creature with huge, moth-like wings, long fingers, sharp claws, and a mass of dark hair. Sometimes called the "unicorn of the deeps" because of its elusive nature, it flies through the eternal darkness on shimmering wings that propel it slowly from place to place. Glouras giggle, sing, and titter more often than they speak, but they can speak drow, elvish, and the faerie tongue.

**Combat:** The glouras' wings create a constant droning song, described by some adventurers as more beautiful even than the songs of sirens. This song allows them to charm other creatures of the underdark, and charmed servants will follow them anywhere, even over a cliff or into roiling rivers. Any creature hearing the glouras' song must make a saving throw vs. spell or be likewise enslaved by the song, becoming a servant. New saving throws are permitted as per the charm person spell; once a creature is free, it cannot be recaptured by the glouras.

In battle, the glouras depends on its song and its charmed servants to survive. These creatures obey their faerie master, attacking heedless of their own lives.

The glouras often offers commentary on its followers, congratulating one on a particularly heavy blow, or berating another for not pressing the attack strongly enough. Glouras seem to have trouble deciding what is sentient and what is not; they address giant spiders and derro as equals in their coterie of followers, and they may even ask sentient followers to apologize to non-intelligent ones if the occasion merits it.

A glouras does more than just command its legions of giant bats, spiders, or sentient creatures into battle; it considers them its court of followers, issuing orders or prompting them to entertain it. This has led some creatures to call the glouras the "royal" or "courtly" faeries.

**Habitat/Society:** Glouras keep to themselves except on nights of the new moon, when they rise to the surface world among swarms of bats, seeking the members of the Unseelie Court



with whom they frolic until the first hint of dawn colors the east. They despise all creatures of daylight and attack them with strength born of rage.

**Ecology:** The glouras is worshiped as a messenger of Elistraee by those few drow who follow that goddess, and it is feared and hunted by the rest. Its shimmering wings are highly valued for use in decorations, and are worth as much as 400 gp to underdark traders.



# Moths, Whispering

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any Underdark
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Swarm
ACTIVITY/CYCLE:	Night
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Low (5-7)
TREASURE:	None
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral Evil

NO. APPEARING:	20-200
ARMOR CLASS:	10
MOVEMENT:	1, Fly 14
HIT DICE:	
THACO:	20
NO. OF ATTACKS	1 as swarm
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Swarm, Insanity
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Reflect spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Standard
SIZE:	T (4" wingspan)
MORALE:	Unsteady (5-7)
XP VALUE:	175

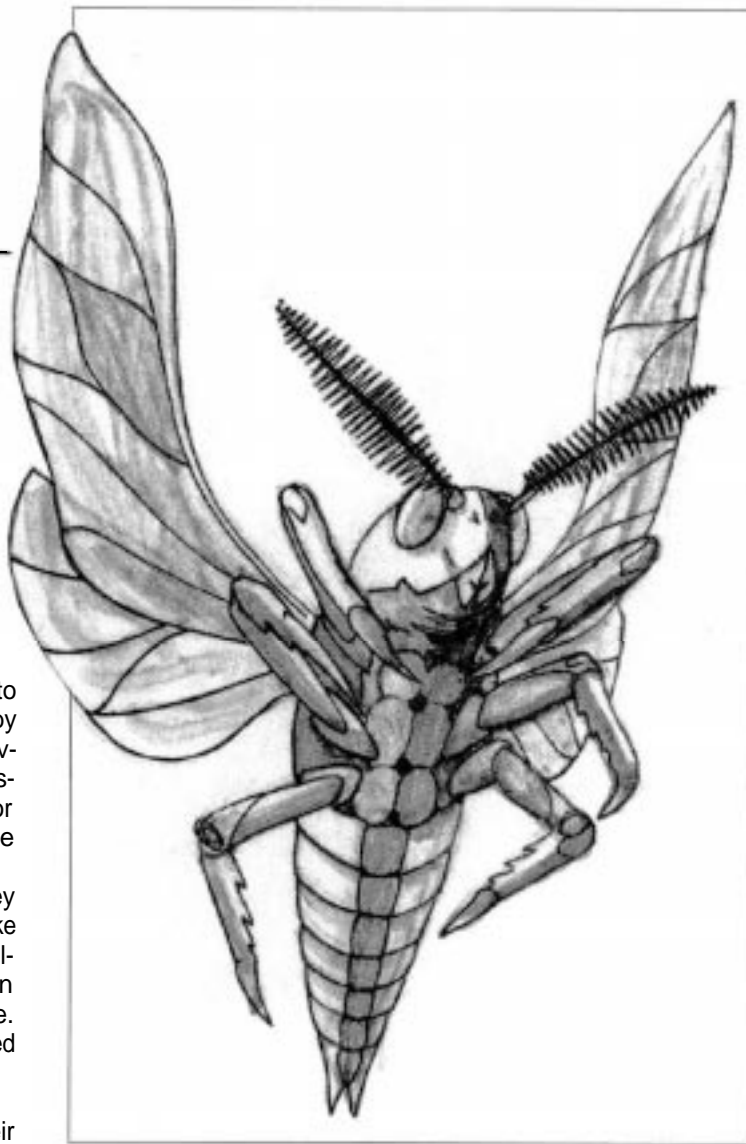
Whispering moths are to the deep Underdark what bats are to the surface world; insectivores who serve a useful function by spreading seeds and distributing fertilizer throughout the cavern systems they inhabit. Despite their benefits to the ecosystem, whispering moths are more often cause for alarm than for joy, because they drive most sentient creatures to bizarre behavior and even permanent insanity.

Individual moths are about 2" long, with a 4" wingspan; they gained their name because of the soft, slithering noise they make in flight, a sound that seems always on the verge of being intelligible. Their wings are glittering, opalescent blurs when in motion, and they glow with their own light on the top surface. The moths are dark and almost invisible when they are perched on cavern walls with their wings folded shut.

**Combat:** Whispering moths are individually weak but gain their strength in numbers. They can attack physically as a swarm. More importantly, the dizzying blur of their glowing wings has magical power and can cause insanity when combined with the sussuration of their wings. Any creature viewing them in darkness must make a saving throw vs. death magic or become raving killers, possessed by bloodlust for a number of hours equal to 24 minus the creature's Wisdom. Creatures caught in the center of a swarm make the saving throw at -1; any creature viewing them near a mirrored surface (such as a still lake or any highly-polished metal) makes the saving throw at a -3 penalty.

This insanity effect cannot occur under lighted conditions; as long as creatures remain within the circle of illumination of any light source, they need not make a saving throw. As soon as they step outside the light's protection, they must make the saving throw normally.

Whispering moths are drawn to any source of fire and magical light, even in the middle of combat; however, rather than being destroyed by these lights or fires, a swarm always manages somehow to magically douse it, restoring darkness. Even permanent light sources such as *continual light* spells or magical weapons are extinguished by the power of the moths.



Finally, the magic of these moths' wings protects them from all spells targeted at them directly; these spells are reflected back at the caster, as if the moths were wearing *rings of spell turning*.

**Society/Habitat:** Whispering moths always travel in groups, never leaving the safety of the fluttering swarm. When resting, they all cover the ceiling or walls of a moist cavern drinking the water from the cave wall.

**Ecology:** Swarms of whispering moths feed on fireweed blooms, fungal spores, and small insects, especially cave crickets, small spiders, and cave fisher young. They are believed to be related to gloomwing moths.

The dried wings of whispering moths are as useful in the ink for symbols of confusion and in the construction of *rings of spell turning*. They are valued at 50 gp/moth or more.

They lay their eggs in water, where the young go through a larval stage before hatching into adults. A swarm of whispering moths hatching from the surface of an underground lake looks like nothing so much as a layer of light peeling off the surface of the water; the doubled reflection is a sight few creatures survive.

# Octopus, Blue Ring

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any Underdark waters
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY/CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Average to Exceptional (8-14)
TREASURE:	None
ALIGNMENT:	Neutral Good

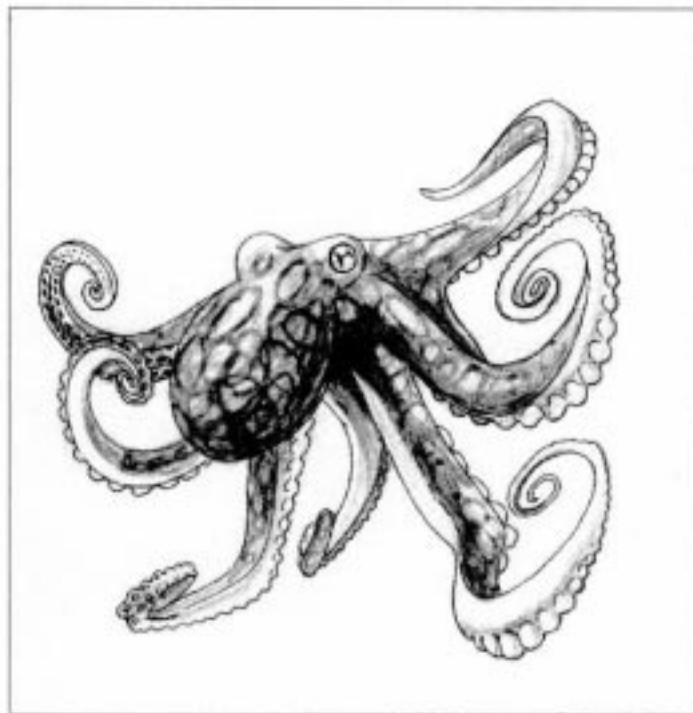
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	2, Swim 12
HIT DICE:	3-5
THAC0:	3-4 HD: 17 5 HD: 15
NO. OF ATTACKS	7
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-2 (x6)/1-4
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Poison, constriction
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Ink, camouflage
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Standard
SIZE:	L (4'-6' long, 4'-10' tentacles)
MORALE:	Elite (14)
XP VALUE:	3 HD: 650 4 HD: 975 5 HD: 1,400 Shaman 1-4: 4,000 Shaman 5-7: 5,000

These very intelligent, shy creatures live in the cracks and crevices of Underdark's oceans, constantly struggling to escape the notice of the more powerful aquatic races. Their bodies are covered with hundreds of blue circles, giving them their name; they have large golden eyes, a greenish-brown beak, and can change their skin color from dark grayish-brown to a dirty white.

**Combat:** Though they almost always strive to avoid combat, when forced to stand and fight they are remarkably skilled fighters. Initially, most blue-rings depend on evasive tactics. Blue-ringed octopi, just like other octopi, have chromatophores embedded in their skin that allow them to change color at will, giving them perfect camouflage against the sea floor. These chromatophores even alter the way the octopus reflects light that allows creatures to see via infravision or ultravision.

When spotted, blue-rings wait for an opponent to approach to within 10' or so, then release their poisonous, milky-white ink. This ink fills a 20' radius sphere, and allows the blue-ring to jet away at high speed, seeking protective cover again. The poison affects only creatures breathing the water through gills or through a magical means, such as a *water breathing* spell. These creatures must make a saving throw vs. poison or suffer 4-24 hp damage and be blinded for 1-6 turns.

In melee, blue-rings hold nothing back, attacking with six tentacles and a bite. The tentacles are almost pure muscle, and are able to constrict their prey. Each hit has a chance to secure a single limb of humanoid prey (roll 1d8): 1=right leg, 2=left leg, 3=right arm, 4=left arm, 5=head (blinded), and 6-8=torso or other non-binding hold. A victim may choose to attempt to break a tentacle's hold; this takes the place of all other actions for the round and requires a successful Open Doors roll.



Worse than constriction, however, the tentacles suffuse their victims with the same poison as their ink; each round that a victim is held it must make a saving throw with a -2 penalty or suffer 4-24 hp damage. A victim held by multiple tentacles must make multiple saving throws but suffers only one set of poison damage/round.

**Habitat/Society:** When captured by aboleth or kuo-toa, they are well-treated and bred for use as a servitor race; many blue-rings are kept in captivity their entire lives. However, keeping blue-ringed octopi always; other octopi always somehow learn of this captivity and seek to free their comrades. This has led to some wild speculation that the blue-rings are telepathic or mages of some kind, though no evidence has ever confirmed this.

**Ecology:** The blue-ring octopi are a nomadic race that strives to avoid conflict. They live everywhere from the shallows to the deepest trenches; they have found underwater connections to the oceans of the surface world and have sometimes been found living in the colder waters of the surface world, where they are allies of the tool-using tako and the locathah.

## Red Shamans

A few octopi from every spawning have rings of ox-blood red; these young are protected and cared for far more than any other blue-ring young, growing much larger than other blue rings (8 HD). They are sheltered and jealously guarded because they grow up to be shamans, capable of reaching 8th level of ability as priests. In addition, the poison of shaman blue-rings is more potent than that of their fellows, inflicting half damage even with a successful saving throw. However, the chromatophores of shamans are always either weak or non-existent; they cannot camouflage themselves, so they often spend their entire lives deep within narrow cleft of rock, where other members of their tribe bring them food and seek their help and advice.

# Squid, Vampire

<b>CLIMATE/TERRAIN:</b>	Any Underdark
<b>FREQUENCY:</b>	Rare
<b>ORGANIZATION:</b>	Solitary
<b>ACTIVITY/CYCLE:</b>	Night
<b>DIET:</b>	Carnivore
<b>INTELLIGENCE:</b>	Average (8-10)
<b>TREASURE:</b>	None
<b>ALIGNMENT:</b>	Lawful Neutral

<b>NO. APPEARING:</b>	1-2
<b>ARMOR CLASS:</b>	3
<b>MOVEMENT:</b>	12
<b>HIT DICE:</b>	7+7
<b>THACO:</b>	11
<b>NO. OF ATTACKS</b>	6 (tentacles) or 1 (bite)
<b>DAMAGE/ATTACK:</b>	1-4 (x6) or 3-36
<b>SPECIAL ATTACKS:</b>	Ram
<b>SPECIAL DEFENSES:</b>	Spikes
<b>MAGIC RESISTANCE:</b>	Standard
<b>SIZE:</b>	H (24' long)
<b>MORALE:</b>	Fanatic (18)
<b>XP VALUE:</b>	5,000

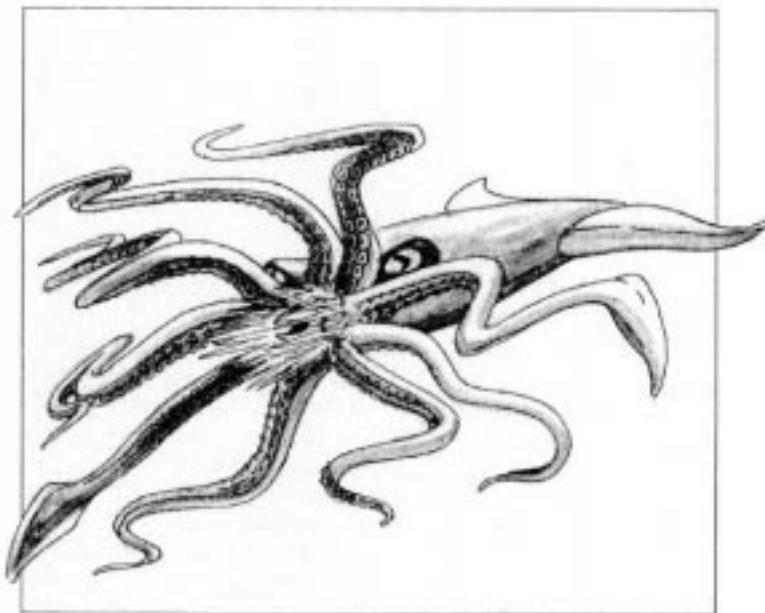
Creations and servitors of the illithids, the vampire squid are tools of the mind flayers, meant to extend their masters' reach into the waters of the sunless seas below the earth. It has lambent blue-green eyes and can see up to 150 yards through dark water; this sight, combined with its ability to reach an underwater "sprint" of up to 33 make it a deadly predator

**Combat:** Though its tentacles are too weak to constrict its prey, the vampire squid has a maw full of spiky, needle-sharp teeth. It uses its tentacles to direct prey to its maw, where it can be dispatched quickly. Each tentacles that successfully holds a victim grants the mouth a +2 bonus to the attack roll; for example, a drow warrior held by three tentacles would suffer 1-4 points abrasion damage and (if the squid were to attempt to bite him) it would attack with a +6 bonus to the roll.

When it sights its prey, the vampire squid prefers to attack by surprise, gathering speed as it approaches on a collision course. The end of its body is a hardened shell; any creature struck by the squid at full speed suffers 2-24 hp damage and may drop any object it is holding if it fails a Wisdom check.

Furthermore, as a defensive measure it can turn its maw inside out, putting spiky teeth on the outside. This turns a retreating vampire squid into a mass of sword-sized spikes, much like an underwater hedgehog. Anyone attacking the vampire squid while it is in this form suffers a damage equal to the attacker's AC (creatures with negative Armor Class suffer no damage).

**Habitat/Society:** Vampire squid are entirely devoted to their creators, the illithids, and obey their every command without hesitation. However, they are not innately evil, and if they can be charmed or otherwise lured away from their masters they are honorable, trustworthy creatures. Those few vampire squid that have been captured by other races often serve as transportation, able to pull great rafts or war-barges through the water; however, these captured vampire squid never reproduce; it is believed that they cannot bear young without magical or



psionic assistance from the illithids, and that this accounts for their loyalty to the mind flayers.

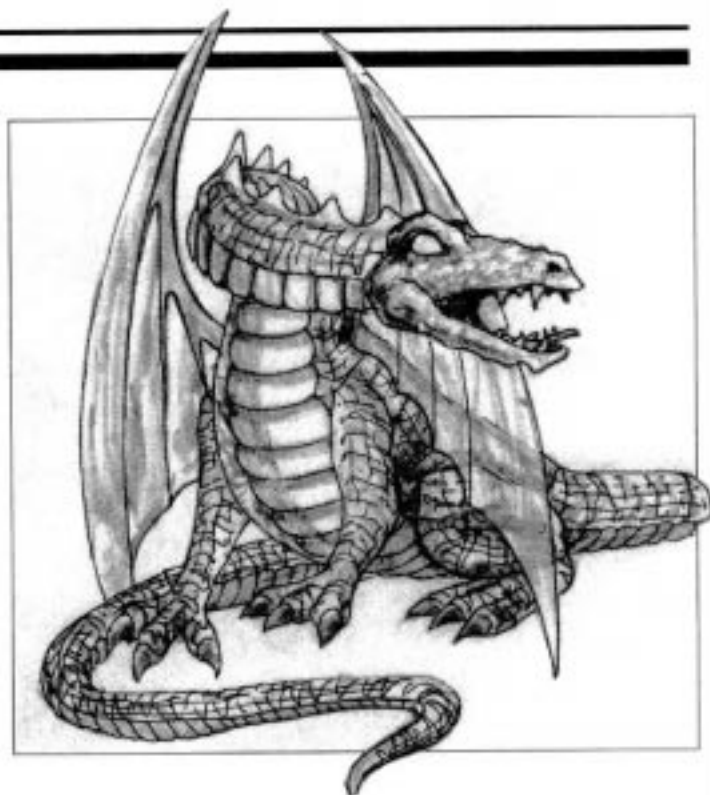
**Ecology:** The vampire squid eat hundreds of pounds of fish, insects, and mollusks; they are almost always solitary for this reason as two such predators sharing the same space quickly destroy the local fish stocks. They gather together only to mate or to serve their masters, who provide them with land-based foodstuffs.



# Wyrms, Albino

**CLIMATE/TERRAIN:** Any Underdark  
**FREQUENCY:** Rare  
**ORGANIZATION:** Family  
**ACTIVITY/CYCLE:** Any  
**DIET:** Carnivore  
**INTELLIGENCE:** High (13-14)  
**TREASURE:** I, U  
**ALIGNMENT:** Neutral Evil

**NO. APPEARING:** 1-3  
**ARMOR CLASS:** 4 base  
**MOVEMENT:** 15, Burrow 3  
**HIT DICE:** 7 base  
**THACO:** 13 base  
**NO. OF ATTACKS** 3  
**DAMAGE/ATTACK:** 1-4/1-4/6-36  
**SPECIAL ATTACKS:** Breath weapon, swallow whole, tail  
**SPECIAL DEFENSES:** Immune to cold  
**MAGIC RESISTANCE:** Standard  
**SIZE:** G (10' + long)  
**MORALE:** Average (8-10)  
**XP VALUE:** Varies



These gaunt, sinewy, wingless creatures are thought to be the descendants of dragons that long ago became trapped in the darkness of the caves, perhaps white dragons. The difficulty in finding prey in the Underdark has made them small, flightless predators who rely on stealth to strike and take down prey. They are found only in the deepest depths of the Underdark.

The albino wyrm has red eyes, mottled white scales, and brownish claws. Its wings are semi-transparent and offer about a 13- to 18-foot wingspan.

**Combat:** Albino wyrms have very weak claws, useful largely for burrowing, and a very powerful bites; they can also constrict their prey with their prehensile tails. This tail attack can pick up any creature behind it and crush it for 1-8 hp damage/round. Armor must make a saving throw versus normal blow each round or be destroyed.

The wyrms small, almost transparent wings are used only in courtship or threat displays and are reminiscent of remorhaz wings. They confer no advantage in combat and cannot bear the creature's weight into the air.

While their wings have faded into uselessness, albino wyrms' jaws have expanded, allowing the creature to swallow its prey

whole on any roll of 4 or more than the number required to hit, and any natural 20. Swallowed creatures make all attacks at -4 and cannot use any large weapons or bludgeoning weapons; unless the swallowed creature does not need to breath, it falls unconscious in 1-4 rounds from lack of air.

When attacking with its breath weapon, the albino wyrm makes a distinctive rattling hiss the moment before loosing its chilling breath. The breath weapon inflicts damage as shown above; it also destroys (generally by shattering) objects that fail an item saving throw vs. cold.

No spell-using albino wyrms have ever been recorded.

**Habitat/Society:** If indeed these are the descendants or an offshoot of dragonkind, then the albino wyrms have indeed fallen far; most are barely sane, barely able to express a coherent thought. They still progress along the same age categories as other dragons, but few survive past the adult age category (5). Unlike almost all other dragons, albino wyrms do not collect treasure that they cannot carry; the need to hunt outweighs the need to gather baubles into a lair. However, they are intelligent enough to recognize and use magical treasures, and often wear jewelry on wingtips, claws, and tail.

Several drow houses are known to keep albino wyrms as house animals and guardians. They are difficult to tame or to train; their predatory instincts are not easily turned to any useful purpose.

**Ecology:** The albino wyrms are at the top of the cave ecosystem; few creatures can harm them. Their constant need for food keeps them on the prowl; albino wyrms are almost always encountered in motion. They are thought to sleep no more than 5% of the time.

Deep dragons considering albino wyrms "despicable" and worthy only of destruction. The two species fight whenever they meet, with the deep dragons emerging victorious in all but a handful of cases.

## Albino Wyrm Age Progression

Age	Body Length	Tail Length	AC	Breath Weapon	MR	Treasure Type	XP Value
1	2-5	1-4	4	1d8 +2	Nil	Nil	1,400
2	5-10	4-8	2	2d8 +3	Nil	Nil	3,000
3	10-15	8-12	0	3d8 +4	Nil	U	6,000
4	14-22	12-16	-1	4d8 +5	Nil	I, U	8,000
5	22-28	16-25	-2	5d8 +6	Nil	I, U	11,000
6	28-40	25-36	-3	6d8 +7	10%	I, U	13,000
7	40-55	36-50	-4	7d8 +8	15%	I, U	15,000
8	55-66	50-58	-5	8d8 +10	20%	I, U	16,000
9	66-80	58-70	-6	10d8 +12	25%	I, Ux2	18,000
10	80-89	70-77	-8	12d8 +14	35%	I, Ux2	19,000
11	89-96	77-90	-10	14d8 +16	45%	Ix2, Ux3, W	20,000
12	96-110	90-120	-13	18d8 +20	60%	Ix3, Ux4, V, Wx2	22,000



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# JOURNEYS TO THE





# DEEPEST DUNGEONS

## Surviving the Underdark

by Wolfgang Baur

illustrated by R. Ward Shipman

**F**or most adventures, heroes don't need to do more than sharpen their weapons and grab ropes, torches, and iron rations, then follow the trail of clues that the DM leaves lying around like breadcrumbs leading to the dungeon door. But when venturing into the Underdark, all that changes: planning becoming the crucial element that determines whether a party lives or dies, and how well it succeeds — if it succeeds at all. In the worst cases, a lack of planning can kill even a high-level party. The Underdark is that deadly.

Some of the AD&D® game's finest adventures are set in the Underdark, including the *Night Below* boxed set, GDQ *Queen of Spiders*, and the A 1-4 *Slaver's* series. Many other adventures for the setting have been printed in *Dungeon® Adventures*, including "Train of Events" (issue #44), "Ship of Night" (issue #20), "Thunder Under Needlespire" (issue #24), "Thiondar's Legacy" (issue #30), and many smaller adventures. Underdark expeditions are great fun to play, but only if you play them smart: that is, like a cross between a traditional dungeon and a traditional wilderness adventure. To make your trip into darkness easier, consider the pros and cons of these two most common approaches to Underdark adventuring: raiders and caravans.

### The raider strategy

The typical approach taken by a party entering the underdark relies on a small group of fast-moving mercenaries who take full advantage of shock and surprise to overwhelm underground settlements or fortifications. I call this the *raider strategy*, because it is similar to the raids launched by the Vikings against the rest of Europe. The raider strategy depends on speed and stealth; raiders carry very little gear, commander supplies as they go, and take no more plunder than they can carry on their backs.

### Fighting blind

Any raiding adventurers entering the Underdark quickly learn that darkness is golden; any source of light is visible for miles underground, giving early

warning to light-sensitive natives. Unless they have some way to compensate for this early warning, most raider groups do without light entirely, to gain more opportunities for stealth and a longer range of vision (using infravision or magic).

The natural ally of darkness is silence; the drow combine the two naturally, but smart adventuring companies adopt the same tactic with magic or with silenced armor, soft boots, and minimal conversation. Activities such as mining can be heard miles away by a properly silent party. Thieves' keen hearing is especially useful here.

In the ideal case, raiders know the blindfighting non-weapon proficiency and can fight in narrow quarters. Dwarves, gnomes, and halflings are at a particular advantage here, since they can fight without penalty in narrow tunnels that taller races find cumbersome. Finally, learning to use pole-arms can grant underground parties an advantage, since it allows a second rank of warriors to attack across the narrow frontage typical in tunnel fighting.

### Spells and trickery

Carrying the right spells can keep a party alive, but underground, those spells vary by the party's approach. Clearly, *lightning bolts* are superior to *fireballs* underground, but what other spells can make a difference for a company of raiders?

*Create food and drink* is one of the most useful spells underground, because it eliminates the need to forage and gather (generally vile) insects, bats, or mushrooms for food, or carrying in heavy packs full of rations from the surface. Raiders need to move silently, so *silence 15' radius* has obvious uses. Magical disguises like *alter self* and *change self* are useful when scouting or entering hostile cities, and *comprehend languages* or *tongues* is vital to communicate with the bizarre races of the Underdark unless the party wants to trust an interpreter. It is also useful when interrogating *charmed* prisoners. *Summon (earth) elemental* is extremely useful in a number of situations, most obviously for combat and movement, but also just for their sheer intimidation value when negotiating with Underdark dwellers.

*Rope trick* creates a completely secure camp for a small party, and it allows everyone to rest. *Phantasmal walls* or *phantasmal collapsed tunnels* can turn away even regular patrols from the site of a camp, if *rope trick* is not available or impractical. Dwarves and smaller races can some-



times find narrow corridors where they cannot be pursued by monsters of prodigious size; these narrow passages run the risk, however, of trapping the party in a dead-end tunnel watched over by a mindlessly hungry beast. Mining your way around such a warden is slow and may attract unwanted attention.

Finally, nothing works so well in confined quarters with trapped air as poison gasses, whether alchemically created from natural materials, by breath weapons, or by spells such as *stinking cloud* and *cloudkill*. Because they are not dispersed by wind, many DMs may allow an extended duration or a penalty to saving throws versus these types of attacks; just be aware that NPCs are sure to have the same bonuses.

### Traveling light

Raiders can't carry much, because they lack beasts of burden, so proper equipment is crucial. Lightweight silk or spider ropes, linen or burlap sacks (not leather), traveler's rations, waterskins, magical light sources, timekeeping candles, and only the most necessary weapons and armor. Cloaks, rain gear, and heat sources are rarely or never needed in the constant underground environment, and no more than blankets are necessary for sleeping. Arrows are rarely lost in caves; half as many can be carried. Every pound saved on equipment is another pound of gold, gems, or mithril that can be carried out. In the worst case, adventurers may simply abandon gear once it has outlived its usefulness, rather than carrying it onward.

The best raiders eventually adopt most of the strategies and equipment of the underground races. Not surprising, really, when you consider that these races have honed their skills in underground combat over generations.

### The caravan strategy

To conquer completely the Underdark requires an approach I call the *caravan strategy*, because it relies on many of the same elements that make up a successful caravan on the surface world: beasts of burden, guards, a wealth of supplies and extra gear, native guides, scouts, animal wranglers, and the tools to deal successfully with the creatures encountered in the Underdark, including generous bribes and possibly even siege equipment.

Why do caravans require bribes? Because they are too big a target to fight

their way quickly past large settlements. What do caravans use as bribes? Gold, food, or even — surprisingly — wood. After all, wood is extremely rare underground; the pulpy wood of giant mushrooms doesn't have the same grain, beauty, strength, and luster. It is both a novelty and status symbol for dark dwellers. In some campaigns, the "trade beads" that Underdark races wanted were relatively common on the surface: wood of any kind, flowers, spices, herbs, and songbirds. These bribes are the caravan's "trade goods," but their purpose isn't to make a mercantile profit; the caravan's goods are carried just to ensure its safe passage to its target. News of the caravan will travel through the passages much faster than the caravan itself will; surprise isn't possible. Trade items make great "gifts" for hardheaded chieftains or sharp-dealing outposts who might otherwise balk at letting small army passes through their caverns.

What is this slow, lumbering strategy good for? A longterm presence in the Underdark, a major expedition to haul out literally a kingdom's worth of loot, a trade expedition to garner riches from underground cities and civilizations, long distance exploration and mapping or a military-style strike against an entrenched enemy are all possible with the resources a caravan brings to bear. In the most extreme version of the strategy, a "surface" race such as dwarves may even attempt the conquest of a small region of the underdark, perhaps one containing valuable ores or gem deposits.

### Tactics

Defensively, bribes and sheer numbers are only part of the picture. When camped, shield walls or magical walls are a crucial component of the caravan's large underground encampment; they provide camouflage and they deflect the initial rush of an enemy's charge. In fact, *walls of stone* can create such a safe encampment that the whole caravan can get some rest; when it is time to move on, a simple *dispel magic* brings the wall down. Tripwires are also valuable; a lone watchman or a small group of sentries, after all, can be *charmed*, *held*, or *poisoned* before they can shout a warning, but a good tripwire or *alarm* spell can save the whole caravan from death or slavery in the hands of raiding drow, aboleth, derro, or kuo-toa.

Sending scouts a few miles ahead makes good tactical sense in this system; caravans are big enough that they can't

respond to threats with a raider-style ambush. If the scouts don't return, at least you are warned, giving the company time to secure beasts of burden and prepare a defensive position, perhaps even to withdraw. If the scouts return with news of changed tunnel conditions (after all, they do collapse, shift, and so on), your adventuring company may save valuable time.

Caravans can't stand and fight often, but when they do they can overwhelm many smaller outposts, mining settlements, monster lairs, and even small towns by sheer numbers. The greatest danger to a caravan is the loss of its beasts of burden; if these animals are slain when the caravan is months underground, the best choice for a low-magic group is to split up into raider-style bands, because the group as a whole won't be able to carry enough food to get back to where it started from. Alternately, the caravaneers can gorge themselves on the meat (fresh food, after all), and attempt a forced march back to the surface. Since they have covered the ground once, they at least know the dangers they will face on the return. Groups with more magic may *polymorph* bats or other creatures into new beasts, or might bargain with natives for pack lizards or other animals, or might even employ native bearers in place of animals; none of these situations is perfect, but they might allow the expedition to continue. Remember: above all and in all situations, a caravan's beasts of burden must be protected.

### Logistics (traveling heavy)

Most adventures need little more than a few days of supplies, or perhaps a few weeks for an involved wilderness adventure. By contrast, Underdark adventures can require months of supplies, making the caravan strategy better than the raider approach for the deepest delving. Why? Because the Underdark, as Gary Gygax envisioned it, does not permit *teleportation* in and out, limiting movement to the rate humans can travel on foot. Even if your version of the Underdark does permit teleportation, the narrow margin of error means that teleporting high or low when trying to reach the Underdark is always fatal. Without this fallback, adventurers must carry everything in or out themselves: food, forage, supplies, and treasure.

Why go on foot when you can ride? The traditional fantasy mounts such as horses, elephants, or even paladins' warhorses, are a dumb idea in the

Underdark; they are too difficult to ride over the terrain, they eat too much, and they require light to be effective. Beasts of burden such as mules, donkeys, and camels, on the other hand, are extremely useful. They can be led through darkness, they eat and drink less because they are smaller animals, and they are sure-footed pack animals, not finicky mounts.

## Getting in, getting out

Regardless of what strategy you use, every visitor to the Underdark faces a number of the same problems: moving over obstacles, adequate supplies, accurate information, and recovering treasure. Caravans' and raiders' supplies have already been covered above; the others are examined here.

### Terrain

Though the monsters of the Underdark are deadly, the varied and difficult terrain makes adventuring there a challenge. Don't expect to cover miles and miles of ground a day in the Underdark; even lightly-equipped, fast-moving raiders will have trouble negotiating more than 10 miles a day in the dark, cramped, rough going of the underground environment; caravans may be lucky to cover half that. What are the secrets to covering maximum distances with minimum fuss? Magic, especially *fly* spells.

Flying doesn't seem like an obvious aid to movement underground, but its value can be immense. Flying raiders can ignore abysses, fly over rivers or underground lakes, and even bypass many defenses built inside the large, city-sized caverns. Unfortunately, the difficulties involved in getting flying mounts underground are as immense as the benefits; most flying creatures dislike the darkness and confined quarters, and their forage requirements can strip most caverns bare in a matter of hours. The best solution is clearly magic: *polymorph spells*, *fly* spells, or magical items that allow their user to fly.

A few generally helpful movement spells are worthy of mention here. The most important travelers' spells to bypass obstacles underground are *dimension door*, *passwall*, *spider climb*, and *wind walk*. The shadow form psionic ability and *potions of gaseous form* are also valuable.

Because Underdark bodies of water are rarely as deep as oceans or other surface waters, spells like *part water* and

*lower water* are especially useful. The latter is especially useful when reversed to stop pursuit; a wall of raging, rising waters will stop even the largest horde of drow or derro.

### Motion without magic

What if those magical resources aren't available to you? It might be better to stay out of the Underdark if you don't have deep magical reserves, but if the lure is too strong, no obstacle is insurmountable. The most common obstacles underground are crevasses, poison gas, vertical tunnels, and water (both rivers [pontoons] and flooded caverns). Mushroom forests, boulder fields, and stalactite-laced caverns are less common but still dangerous. Here's how to overcome them without magic:

Crevasses can be scaled or descended by anyone with mountaineering skill and the proper tools; larger or bottomless abysses must be bridged, usually by a rope and grapple for narrow chasms, by climbing down one side and up the other for larger underground canyons (note that beasts of burden can lower heavy goods and even each other down cliffs under good conditions). Caravans that have been in the Underdark for a while may have *charmed* spiders or cave fishers available to spin silk to lower goods and animals down vertical tunnels or cliffs — and most web-spinning spiders are able to act as hoists, reeling in the silk they have spun out. In many cases these crevasses are make-or-break problems for caravan expeditions, since beasts of burden must be left behind. Prepared caravans will have a sturdy rope bridge available to cross smaller spans; even then, crossings are slow and leave the caravan vulnerable to attack by whatever monstrous creatures live within the crevasse itself.

Poison gas can be explosive or toxic; in either case, it must often be circumvented. Giant fans or a *gust of wind* can clear out small pockets of dead air, but entirely new air may be needed for long stretches of explosive gas. A controlled explosion can be just the thing, but setting off the gas without collapsing the roof, deafening party members, or alerting every monster within 20 miles is more difficult. The ideal explosion burns off the explosive gas and sucks in breathable air to replace it. Few sages or miners have this skill, but a native of the Underdark might now how it is done safely. Most often, these areas must be avoided or circumvented entirely.

Rivers can be forded with pontoon bridges or rafts made of giant mushroom caps, wood (from a caravan's trade goods), inflated waterskins (for small raiding parties), or (if you've been in the Underdark for a while) the cleaned, inflated intestines of one of those annoying purple worms. Aquatic creatures may also offer a ferry service in the more civilized sections of the Underdark, along trade routes.

With a little imagination, most difficult terrain can be overcome: mushroom forests can be tipped over, stairs dug out of cliffs, quick shortcuts can be dug by xorn or elementals, or the right tools can change the parameters of the problem (a hot air balloon can work wonders if the exit from the tunnel you are in is on the ceiling!). The most successful approach to difficult terrain, however, is to avoid the difficult roads in the first place, and the best way to do this is to have proper information at hand.

### Reconnaissance

Accurate reconnaissance can save an adventurer months of travel, dozens of combats, and valuable resources. How do you get the best, most current information about routes spanning dozens or hundreds of miles underground? One of the most frequently overlooked resources available underground are the indigenous races. These creatures don't just cross through tunnels once in while on some great quest; they live here. Who better to ask for information about potential dangers, food sources, equipment, and trade opportunities?

The value of this information cannot be overstated; imagine a forking tunnel, one side leading to a city of deep dwarves, the other side a 20-mile-long dead end. A well-informed group saves itself days of travel, valuable supplies, and the risk of being trapped in a dead end by a wandering monster that could otherwise be avoided. Sure, winning battles in the Underdark is important, but winning the information war is even more important.

Not every Underdark region has well-informed, helpful natives; some of the most dangerous regions are actively avoided by intelligent creatures, but must be traversed by adventurers. How to get useful information in a largely-uninhabited zone? Scouts are the answers. Scouts are another avenue for gathering information; if possible, you can use natives or *charmed* creatures as scouts — after all, they're more expend-



able than heroes, right? Though the civilized races are obvious candidates for guides, speak with animals can allow you to question the local bats about distant routes and caverns, or a priest can use it to speak with cave fish to find out what lies upstream or downstream of a small river crossing. Questioning spiders underground is not recommended; their ties to the drow are well-known, and they might pass along as much information as they give out. Finally, some kind DMs might let you use *speak with plants* to communicate with mushrooms.

Not all recon comes from guides or questioning; maps of underdark trade routes can be bought in most major cities. How accurate they are is another matter; the more paranoid races might deliberately sell false maps to anyone who is not a citizen of the city, especially obvious surface dwellers. Maps found in treasure hoards are also valuable, though they might be dated, depending on when they were added to a hoard.

Be aware that different races may see routes obstacles differently; flying drow aren't likely to mark crevasses well, whereas koa-toan maps might show only rivers and lakes, without much detail of dry tunnels and caverns (the emphasis is the reverse of a land-based map of the underdark). Dwarven or svirfneblin mining charts of veins are more expensive than mere maps, but they might also be helpful in determining tunnel size, direction, and incline; these charts tend to convey more and better information than simple dot-and-line maps of passages and caverns, but they also show many tiny passages as passable that would make most surface-dwellers quite claustrophobic. Know the source, and question it before making assumptions about Underdark maps.

## Loot

Given that the Underdark is such a pain to get into, survive, and get out of, why would your smart, powerful heroes ever bother? In four words: the loot is incredible. Exotic metals like mithril and adamantite glimmer in the walls and in your fallen enemies' hands. Powerful and bizarre new spells clutter the shelves of mages, bound in tomes of tanned aboleth hide. In the oldest, deepest caverns, the wealth of entire lost civilizations is there for the taking. Big treasure hoards are common in a place where gold and gems sometimes line the very walls.

In fact, the size of the treasures involved is sad news in a way. The real trouble of an Underdark adventure begins when your party scores a big hit, when you find a treasure trove that would make Smaug jealous. How do you get it back to civilization? Remember all those crevasses, rivers, vertical tunnels, and narrow passages? What about the hostile natives? How do you haul wagons full of loot back past all the obstacles you crossed to get to it?

Well, it's not hopeless. The treasure got there somehow, didn't it? And even if it got there a bit at a time, you can still take it out the same way.

Adventurers have four options when carting off treasure: you can take less, take it apart, take it later, take an alternate route out. Let's examine each of these in turn, keeping in mind that caravans can afford to be less fussy (at least, until the animals balk at carrying any more).

By taking less, I mean cherry-picking each treasure trove, taking only the finest gems, ignoring all metals but platinum, carrying off only the finest gems, and using a system to take only the best (and most portable) magical items. Sure, that *two-handed blade of doom* +2 is great, but the *mace* +3 weighs much less and does just as much damage. This method is best for raider parties, or for caravans with DMs who enforce the encumbrance rules. Take the treasures you can't find on the surface, and don't worry about the rest.

By taking it apart, I mean breaking treasures down magically: turn that gold statue of the emperor-saint of the kuo-toa into a patch on your mage's robe with an *item* spell, stuff gems into magical containers like *Leomund's secret chest*, *portable holes*, and the like, or mark the best loot with *word of recall* or other summonings to call them to hand after you've made it back to the surface. If all else fails, *polymorph* any object to turn your heaviest treasures into pebbles, and for heaven's sake don't use them as sling-stones!

In the case of the largest dragon hoards, temple treasuries, and deep dwarven crypts, you may not be able to carry off even a fraction of what you find. In this case, it's worth trying guardians (hey, it works for mad wizards' dungeons, why not let it work for you?) Simply *polymorph* some of your animals into guardians of your choice (piercers? gorgons? gargoyles? Anything horrific will do). If you don't have creatures to

*polymorph* or if the local environment lacks food and water to sustain them, use spells like *wyvern watch*, *hold portal*, *glyph of warding*, and *fire seeds* to keep the treasure safe until you return to drag off more of it. Sometimes it works, and if nothing else, you are creating a challenge for the next group of adventurers to happen by.

Alternate routes require luck or careful planning. You can either exit the Underdark entirely by a different route than you came in, avoiding recrossing the same ground. This allows you to shake pursuit and reduces the dangers of passing back through areas that you looted earlier, where survivors may have rebuilt and gathered allies and reinforcements. If you have the resources, you can also just *plane-shift* your way out, avoiding any return trip entirely with a detour through the Astral, Ethereal, or the demi-plane of Shadows. Unfortunately, not everyone can count on an *amulet of planes*, *astral spell*, or the like. Dwarven caravans may be able to dig a set of stairs more or less straight up, with wizardly assistance, but this is a brute-force solution. Following a river out to the sea works well if you can swim and breathe water, or if you can bribe the aboleth or kuo-toa with troglodyte or other evil slaves. Sometimes you just have to plan a circular route, or be lucky enough to explore until you find an exit. *Augury* spells, *find the path*, and other divination magic may help find a shorter route to the surface; use them.

## A final warning

With careful plans, your Underdark expedition can be not just exciting but also profitable, dragging home a king's ransom and earning the loyalty of a small army of followers. Respect the dangers of the mixed environment, and choose the strategy you think suits you best. Then choose your favorite caverns and head for the underworld!



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Dreelix pounded the gavel on the head table three times and liked what he heard. This is the sound of power and authority, he thought.

All eyes turned his way, as wizards and sages ceased their muttered conversations and gave him their undivided attention. Dreelix cleared his throat and prepared his best speaking voice. "This meeting of the Monster Hunters Association is hereby opened," he intoned.

He shuffled a few papers in front of him as if consulting them, but in fact he knew exactly what he would say next. "Tonight we'll hear a status update on preparations for this spring's planned troll's-blood-gathering expedition, and Zantoullios will brief us on some fascinating new uses he's found for troglodyte bladders. But first, we have a new application for membership."

Excited whispers passed throughout the room, as the members looked around the tables to see if they could spot the new member.

"Buntleby, please approach the lectern."

A thin figure in gray robes stood up from his place at a table in the back, then walked up to the podium, at the right of the head table. He faced Dreelix, who was back to shuffling papers. The whisperers fell silent, eager to hear what followed.

"Buntleby of the Western Grove, you have applied for membership in the Monster Hunters Association."

"I have."

"Before allowing you entry into our illustrious organization, there are certain questions we must put to you. First of all, have you paid the entrance fee?"

"I have."

Dreelix looked over at Grindle the Coin-Counter, who gave a terse nod.

"And have you a sponsor?"

"Spontayne the Studious does me that honor."

Dreelix scanned the crowd of faces, and found Spontayne sitting in the back, his arms crossed in their usual position and his bearded face in its usual near-sowl. "Is this so?" asked Dreelix.

# THE ECOLOGY OF

## The Osquip

### Rats!

by Johnathan M. Richards

illustrated by James Holloway

"It is," Spontayne replied.

"Very well then, Buntleby. Tell us, of what creature do you bring us knowledge? How might your inclusion into our hallowed ranks benefit the Association?"

"I bring you detailed information on the osquip, its habits, tactics, and usefulness—"

"Osquip?" interrupted Dreelix. "You mean that little rat with the extra legs?"

"The same."

"That's the 'monster' you've studied? A rat?"

"Not just a rat, no. The osquip is far more dangerous than any mere rat. And its potential for—"

"Still, its not much of a 'monster,' is it? Are you sure this is worth our time?"

"I believe it is. Perhaps you will hear me out and decide for yourselves."

"Let him speak," grumbled Spontayne from the back row.

"Very well. You may begin your presentation," said Dreelix, with a nod to the Conjuror Ablasta, who began her spell.

Immediately, a feather quill rose from the table and sat perched above an open book of blank pages at Dreelix's right, ready to record the new applicant's words.

Buntleby turned and addressed the audience. "The osquip, as I will show you, is much more than a rat with an extra set or two of legs. It is an enigma, a puzzle, but one that perhaps holds the key to a question that has plagued many a naturalist over the centuries."

At a table on the left, Willowquisp the Zoophile pricked up his ears, his curiosity obvious to anyone looking his way.

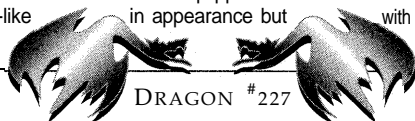
"To begin with, the osquip, while definitely belonging to the rodent family, is more closely related to the beaver than to the rat. This is most obvious in the size and structure of the front teeth, which project outward several inches from the jaw. However, while most rodents have four prominent incisors, two on top and two below, the osquip has twelve. This gives it a fearsome bite, enabling it to cut through solid rock and do terrible damage to its enemies.<sup>1</sup>

"Unlike the beaver, though, the osquip has no fur and lacks the beaver's flattened tail. The tail, when present<sup>2</sup>, often closely resembles that of a rat, a fact that no doubt contributes to the commonly-held misconception that the osquip is some sort of mutant rat." With

1. As with most rodents, the osquip's teeth grow constantly and must be worn down through chewing. As the osquip's teeth are strong enough to chew through solid rock, nothing less than rock can wear them down. For this reason, osquips are almost always expanding their tunnel networks, not only to increase their living space (and hiding spots) but also to wear down their teeth.

Occasionally, an osquip's incisors will not be correctly aligned, and it will have either an overbite or an underbite. This occurrence, called malocclusion, prevents the teeth from being worn down properly, and eventually the teeth will grow to such a size that the creature cannot eat and will starve to death.

2. Osquip tails are almost as variable as the number of their limbs. Most are equipped with a rat-like tail a full 12 inches in length, but some (20% or so) have no tail, while others (5% at most) have a short, stumpy tail, rat-like in appearance but with a tail-to-body ratio similar to that of a bear.



this, Buntleby stole a quick look at Dreelix, but the leader was toying with his gavel and made no comment.

"Perhaps its most odd feature is the number of its limbs. All osquips have multiple pairs of legs, ranging from three to five, with three pairs being the most common. The number of limbs varies from individual to individual, and often baby osquips from the same litter will differ in the number of limbs they possess. I have been involved in raising osquips in captivity for close to eight months now, and I have often seen eight- or ten-legged osquips born of six-legged parents, so this doesn't seem to be an inherited trait.

"The osquip makes its home underground and will often be found in sprawling, complex labyrinthine tunnels of their own making. They live in a family-based pack structure, consisting of a mated pair and their various offspring. Osquips breed four or five times a year, producing litters of three to five whelps at a time. The young reach maturity in a matter of a few short months and are often breeding at about six months of age.<sup>3</sup> They live for about nine years.

"Osquips are strictly carnivorous, feeding mostly on other small mammals. There have been instances of cannibalism, but these acts are usually against enemy osquip packs; an osquip will never attack a member of its own pack, although they will eat their own dead if they happen upon the body." Buntleby noticed several members making faces of disgust, wrinkling their noses or putting their hands up over their mouths. *Odd reaction from a bunch of self-professed Monster Hunters*, he thought.

"While usually found alone, osquips occasionally make alliances with intelligence subterranean creatures, such as jermlaine. I myself have seen such an alliance in effect, during some field research involving frequent use of *invisibility* and *polymorph self* spells. Such alliances are often dangerous to the jermlaine, not to mention expensive, for

the osquip must be heavily bribed with food and shiny objects, or it will turn on the jermlaine and devour it. However, to a jermlaine, the expense is worth it, for in exchange he receives a riding mount, beast of burden, and watchdog, all rolled into one."

Buntleby cleared his throat and looked around the room. "There is one additional benefit a jermlaine receives in a partnership with an osquip, but it is rather unusual. Nonetheless, it is true, and I report it to you now only in the interests of completeness.

"As I have said before, osquips can, and often do, chew through solid rock. However, their stomachs are not quite up to the level of ability as are their teeth, and the stone is only partially digested. In effect, what passes from an osquip's digestive system has a consistency similar to wet cement, and this substance is used by the jermlaine in a variety of interesting ways."<sup>4</sup>

Dreelix slapped his hand down on the table in front of him. "Buntleby!" he sputtered. "Do you really think we are in the least bit concerned about the alleged uses of... such a substance?" Dreelix was actually turning red in the face.

"I allege nothing; I merely report a fact. If you doubt me, I invite you to see for yourself." He motioned towards Spontayne, who reached beneath the table and brought out a cloth-covered cage. Placing it on the table in front of him and pulling off the cloth, he revealed a barred cage of shining metal. Inside was a hideous creature of pale yellow-gray, leathery skin.

Spontayne opened the door of the cage, and out skittered the osquip. It was of the "standard" variety; that is, it had the most common features of its kind — six legs and a long, rat-like tail. It sniffed the air curiously and squinted out at the surprised members of the Association.<sup>5</sup>

"Gentlemen — and Lady Ablasta — allow me to present Ozzie. Ozzie, be so good as to approach Dreelix at the head table, if you would. He doubts my claims;

perhaps he requires a sample...?"

The creature scuttled across the table<sup>6</sup> and jumped nimbly to another, making his way toward the head table. As he passed, grown men, wizards and sages alike, backed up their chairs in order to let him by without having him brush against them. The sound of many voices filled the hall, as varied men of learning were simultaneously repulsed, fascinated, or amused by the spectacle.

"Look at that thing!"

"Ugly little sucker!"

"Fascinating! It obeys him!"

"Dreelix will have a fit."

"Most amusing!"

Dreelix pounded noisily with his gavel. "Order! We'll have order in here! Buntleby, call off your beast. I don't want it anywhere near me."

"As you wish. Come here, Ozzie. Good boy!" The creature jumped down from the table and crawled over to the gray-clad wizard, who stooped down and rubbed its leathery head. Ozzie, for his part, sighed contentedly and curled up at Buntleby's feet, rat-tail curled around his master's right ankle.

"Now then, if you're done with your little spectacle," Dreelix said with a grimace, "kindly get on with your briefing. And I would thank you to consider the dignity of those in whose company you find yourself. We are not concerned with tales of the properties of... well, dung."

"But of course, Dreelix. Forgive me, I forgot my surroundings. And let me say that I look forward with great anticipation to the discussion of troglodyte bladders later this evening." The young mage nodded in Dreelix's direction, and received only a scowl in return.

A voice was raised from the side of the room. "Excuse me, Dreelix? A suggestion, if I might, yes?" The speaker was Old Gumphrey, a sage of no small renown. "Perhaps we might dispense with the briefing format at this time and simply put questions to young Buntleby here. Yes?" He looked about the room at his compatriots. "Agreed?"

---

3. Once at the age of sexual maturity, osquips tend to mate with the nearest available partner, regardless of relationship. Thus, parent and offspring often produce a new generation of offspring, some of whom might end up mating with the original parent. There is a good chance that the odd appearance of the osquip and the variety of tail size and limb quantity is a result of long-term chromosomal damage to the gene pool.

4. Osquip dung hardens after about an hour's exposure to air, at which time it maintains the hardness of stone. For this reason, jermlaine often use osquip dung as mortar to make stone walls, seal off tunnel entrances, and even to fashion sling stones and crude stone implements like axeheads. As for the osquips themselves, they apparently do not have either the intelligence or the inclination to come up with creative uses for their droppings.

5. Osquip vision is somewhat poor, and bright lights, while causing no harm (nor causing any combat penalties), do tend to make them somewhat nervous. They have an excellent sense of smell, somewhat akin to that of a dog, and relatively good hearing.

6. When walking, osquips move rather like insects. A six-legged osquip moves its front and rear legs on its right side and its middle leg on its left side forward at the same time, then follow with its front left, rear left, and middle right legs. Osquips with eight or ten legs walk similarly, moving alternate legs simultaneously so that half of their legs, however many that may be, are on the ground at the same time.

"Yes, an excellent suggestion," piped up Spontayne, looking squarely at Dreelix. "That way you may approach only those subjects you find of interest and avoid those you deem inappropriate."

"Very well," agreed Dreelix. "So be it. Buntleby, perhaps you haven't grasped this idea quite yet, but this association is founded solely for the purpose of obtaining rare and valuable body parts from strange and unusual creatures, useful in the production of magical spells, items, and the like. Look about you, what do you see? Wizards and sages, every one of us. We're not a bunch of mindless warriors, eager to pit our muscles and weapons against the newest monster to come along, just to say we did it. Neither are we cloistered scholars, seeking out knowledge for the sake of knowledge. So, Buntleby, I put it to you: What good is your information about osquips? How might we use the osquip to our advantage?"

"If you wish to limit yourselves in such a way, then so be it." Buntleby cleared his throat. "In a magical sense, the most useful part of an osquip is his teeth. Osquip incisors can be used as substitute material components for the *dig* spell, allowing it to be cast as normal, or it can be used to affect an amount of solid stone equal to half as much dirt normally affected. The teeth are, naturally, consumed in the course of the spell."

"How many teeth per spell use?"

"Two: one upper and one lower incisor from the same creature."

Dreelix rubbed his hands together, and glanced over at the feather-quill to be sure it was getting all of this down. It scribbled away, apparently catching up on what was said, then resumed its upright stance, waiting for further conversation to record. "Now we're getting somewhere. What else have you got?"

"I have found that osquip dung is a perfectly usable substitute for clay in the use of the *stone shape* spell."

"Again with the dung, eh? And are there any benefits to be gained by substituting the dung for the clay?"

"None whatsoever. The spell performs exactly the same way no matter which substance is used. I mention it only to point out there may be times when the spell is required and clay is not at hand."

"And osquip droppings are. And I suppose you suggest that we all start carrying droppings with us for such an emergency."

"Not at all. I merely thought to report a use for what to me, at least, is a common substance."

Dreelix snorted. "A common substance. Do you bring that beast with you everywhere you go?"

"I try not to let him stray too far."

A voice from the back piped up. "Must you bribe him, as would a jermlaine?"

"Were he just my pet, then yes," replied Buntleby. "However, Ozzie here is my familiar, and as such requires no constant bribes for his loyalty."

That comment started up a whole new round of whisperings and mutterings around the room. Buntleby noticed that the feather-quill did not bother recording any of the side-comments made by the gathered members, but rather it concerned itself solely on who "had the floor" at the time. Duly impressed, he made a mental note to himself to have a talk with the Conjurer Ablasta at a later time.

"Let's move on," suggested Dreelix. "Tell us about combat with the creatures. Is there anything we should know about fighting these things?"

"Only that they are very cunning and will attack any threat to their territory. As I have said, their tunnel networks are very elaborate; and, in a mine or dungeon corridor that contains an osquip nest, there are bound to be many secret tunnel entrances at the floor level from which the osquips can spring on intruders. In addition, most osquip networks contain at least one passage that slopes upward to a height of at least eight or nine feet and opens out onto the main cavern or mine shaft. The osquips use this as an ambush point, where they can leap down upon unsuspecting prey. Then, if the victim puts up a struggle, they scurry off into one of their holes for safety and attack with surprise from a differ-

ent direction, out of a different hole.<sup>8</sup>

"So what is the best defense against the beasts in such a situation?" asked Dreelix.

"If at all possible, get to a position with your back against a wall, where the osquips must attack you from a facing direction. This is not as easy as it sounds, however, as you must ensure there are no ambush points above you, or hidey-holes at your feet, and these are hard to spot in the midst of heated combat. Of course, the optimal place, in terms of defense, is in a pool of water."

"Why so?"

"Osquips are terrible swimmers. Partly this is due to their large number of legs, which tend to hinder smooth swimming strokes. I believe the biggest reason, though, is their diet: with bellies full of partially-digested stone, most osquips tend to sink straight to the bottom."

"Very well then, Buntleby, I believe I've heard enough. You've picked an odd 'monster' for study, but it seems you've researched it well enough." He turned his attention to the members, and formally intoned, "I call now for a show of hands: who supports the nomination of Buntleby of the Western Grove into our esteemed ranks?" After a quick scan across the hall, he said, "Very well, let it be noted that a full majority of members voted in Buntleby on this day. Buntleby, I hereby welcome you into the Monster Hunters Association. Please take your seat, and put your... familiar back in its cage."

Buntleby gathered up Ozzie, snoring gently at his feet, and took his seat next to Spontayne. "Nicely done," said the bearded man to his younger colleague.

"And now, on to the next order of business," intoned Dreelix, in what he considered his most effective and business-like voice. Zantoulios, do you have those bladders ready?"

As they filtered out of the meeting hall, Buntleby felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned, and saw Willowquisp the Zoophile. "A word, if I might, Buntleby."

"Yes, of course," replied the young mage, shifting his position in order to

7. Osquip familiars tend to be a rather rare occurrence. They almost never respond to a *find familiar* spell unless the wizard is specifically attempting to establish a link with an osquip (as was the case with Buntleby). In order to do so, the wizard must include at least 5,000 gp worth of shiny objects — usually coins and gems, and the more highly-polished the better — as material components for the spell. These components are not consumed as part of the spell, but must be turned over to the osquip if it answers the summons. As "bribes" go, this is the only one required to maintain loyalty, for once the osquip accepts the role as the wizard's familiar, loyalty from then on is assured.

It should be pointed out that the above addition to the *find familiar* spell in no way guarantees that an osquip will answer the summons. It is possible that a different creature will arrive to serve the wizard as a familiar, or that nothing at all will appear. DMs, of course, have the final say, but it is worth mentioning that an osquip is more powerful than the average familiar (3+1 HD, with a 2-12 hp damage attack), and might be more appropriate for a higher-level wizard.

8. Osquips impose a -5 penalty to their opponents' surprise rolls when they attack in this fashion.



better balance the weight of Ozzie's cage, inside which the osquip was snoring contentedly.

"Earlier, in your briefing, you said something about the osquip holding the key to a puzzle that has intrigued naturalists over the years. Being a naturalist, I find myself eager to hear more."

"Certainly. It's the matter of the variable number of legs each osquip has. I'm not certain what factor decides how many legs an osquip will be born with, for it doesn't seem to be an inherited trait, but it seems to me that such a limb-variability might help explain a few things taken for granted in the natural world."

"Such as?"

"Take the dragon. It, like most lizards, has four legs, and yet it has wings as well. Anyone taking a close look at a dragon's wings will see that they are a specialized form of limb, much like a bat's. Notice that the bat managed to grow its wings by adapting its forelimbs to that function. But what about the dragon? For a dragon to grow wings, it seems reasonable to me that at one point in its lineage, there had to be a spare set of limbs available to evolve

into wings.

"Another example: look at the kobold and the urd. Are you familiar with the urd?"

"Not at all."

"It's basically a winged kobold. Unlike the bat, however, an urd still has functional arms, and independent wings. Again, those wings had to come from somewhere. Or, take the displacer beast. There is no doubt that the displacer beast is a member of the cat family, is there?"

"None at all, to the best of my knowledge."

"And yet it has two extra sets of limbs: one extra set of legs, and a pair of tentacles. Somewhere down the line, it had a common ancestor with, say, the tiger. So where did it get its extra limbs?"

"I believe the osquip holds the answer. I think that perhaps its unusual limb-number variability is something that has occurred before, in other species. I think that the cat family, at one point, had four, six, or eight limbs, and that eventually the species evolved into your normal four-legged varieties, as well as oddities such as the eight-

limbed displacer beasts and the six-legged cantobele. Yet, none of these creatures today has limb-number variability."

"So you think, over time, this variability stabilizes?"

"It must. I would venture to guess that, many years from now, the osquip as we know it today will be no more, that it will have produced new breeds of creatures, some with six limbs, some with eight, and some with ten. Furthermore, I predict that these three strains of creatures will be separate life-forms of their own, in the same way that a displacer beast is distinct from a tiger."

"And what will the extra limbs become?"

"Who can say? Wings, perhaps, like the dragon? Tentacles? Something new altogether? Only time will tell."

"Time, indeed, will tell."



*Johnathan M. Richards enjoys looking at the unusual aspects of AD&D® monsters. He lives on Vandenberg Air Force Base, California.*

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by Jeanine N. Mielecki

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# Sage Advice

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by Skip Williams

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If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, *DRAGON*® Magazine, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva, WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, *DRAGON Magazine*, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge, CB1 3LB, U.K. You can also send your questions via e-mail to [tsrsage@aol.com](mailto:tsrsage@aol.com).

We are no longer able to make personal replies. Please send no SASE with your questions. SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines.

This month, the Sage handles a variety of questions straight out of the mailbox. The sage reveals how wererats pass on lycanthropy, re-examines a question from previous column, and offers a few suggestions about character aging.

**The damage listed for wererats in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM*® accessory is "by weapon"; how does a wererat infect victims with lycanthropy? Do wererats have a bite attack? If so, how much damage does it inflict?**

Yes, wererats using weapons can inflict lycanthropy, but only when in their ratman form. Note that the ability to inflict lycanthropy through weapon attacks is (thus far) unique to wererats. Wererats have no bite when in ratman or human forms. When in giant rat form, however, a wererat's bite inflicts 1d3 points of damage, and bite attacks can inflict lycanthropy.

**If a slain character is brought back to life with a priest's *resurrection* spell, does the character lose a point of Constitution? The description for the *raise dead* spell explicitly says the recipient loses the point of Constitution, but the *resurrection* description doesn't mention anything about Constitution loss.**

A character must make a resurrection survival check if *raised* or *resurrected*, and the character loses a point of Constitution if the check succeeds (see the *DUNGEON MASTER*® Guide, page 104).

In the original D&D® campaigns

played in the Lake Geneva area in the 1970s, characters who received *resurrection* spells did not have to make resurrection survival rolls. The *resurrection* spell still has a saving throw listing of "none," which is an erroneous holdover from the original version of the spell. If your campaign is particularly challenging, you might want to consider waiving the survival check for characters who receive *resurrection* spells. Considering the drain a *resurrection* spell puts of the caster (temporary incapacitation and three years of unnatural aging), you might want to waive the Constitution loss, too. If you do so, a character's initial Constitution score should still also be the maximum number of times a the character can be *raised* or *resurrected*.

**At one time, a character using the 6th-level wizard spell *project image* could cast spells through the image. That doesn't seem to be the case now. What gives?**

A key sentence was inadvertently dropped from the spell's description. The sentence reads: "A special channel exists between the image of the caster and the caster, so spells cast actually originate from the image." Note that certain barriers, such as *walls of force* and *anti-magic shells* can block the channel even if the caster can see the image.

**I am having a difficult time trying to find the difference between the new AD&D® products and AD&D 2nd Edition rules. Do the newer, thicker books contain a new edition of the rules?**

The "new" AD&D game books released in 1995 are a repackaging of the AD&D 2nd Edition game, intended merely to upgrade the game's graphic look. The new books do not contain a new edition of the rules. Check out the Forward in the new *Player's Handbook* (page 3) for details.

**In issue #224, you said that there are no bards native to Krynn. However, according to the tables on page 81 of the *World Book of Ansalon* from the *Tales of the Lance* boxed set, there are**

bards (with included level limits for the various races of Ansalon). What's up?

**How come kender can't become wizards when they can become bards?**

I am guilty of a misstatement. What I should have said in issue #224 was that Krynn has no native bards as the *Player's Handbook* describes them. In the AD&D core rules, a "bard" is a rogue character who can cast some wizard spells. Krynn has no such characters.

According to Harold Johnson, TSR, Inc.'s resident DRAGONLANCE® setting guru, anyone with a talent for singing can be properly called a bard on Ansalon. Goldmoon, for example, is famous bard as well as a renowned cleric. As a few readers have pointed out, there is a bard profession available to Krynn residents. These characters, however, are thief characters who can sing and play musical instruments (see page 80 of the *World Book of Ansalon*). A Krynn bard functions as a regular thief but starts play with the ability to sing and play a portable musical instrument. Krynn bards do not cast wizard spells, which is why a kender can be a bard but not wizard.

**If a fighter character used 10 *wishes* to raise his Strength score from 17 to 18, would he immediately roll for exceptional Strength? The *PHB* says any warrior with a Strength score is entitled to an exceptional Strength roll. However, the section on *wishes* in the *DMG* makes no mention of this at all.**

The DM has final say on the results of *wishes*. There's is nothing wrong with granting exceptional Strength rolls to warriors who obtain Strength scores of 18 through *wishing* (unless they are halflings; see *PHB*, page 27) but the DM is not obligated to do so. If the DM decides not to allow an immediate roll for exceptional Strength, the warrior in question can either be assumed to have a normal (unexceptional) Strength rating of 18 or an exceptional Strength rating of 18/01 at the DM's option.

**Page 86 of the *Ruins of Undermountain II* adventure makes a passing mention of rangers casting wizard spells, and in the book *Shadows of Doom* the ranger Sharantyr uses one of Elminster's wands. The *PHB*, however, says rangers get priest spells. Which spells do rangers get?**

The reference to rangers casting wizard spells in *Ruins of Undermountain II* is an erroneous throwback to the original AD&D game, which granted some wizard



spells to high-level rangers. Any number of things could account for the wand-wielding ranger from *Shadows of Doom*: there could have been a error in the narrative, the wand in question could be a special item, the character in question could have a special ability, and so on.

**Let's say a wizard casts a *magic missile* spell at an enemy fighter. At the time the wizard casts the spell, an invisible thief is in the direct line of fire between the wizard and the fighter. Does the *magic missile* strike the thief because he is in the way? Or do the *missiles* from the spell, which strike their targets unerringly, zip around the thief and strike the fighter, thus revealing the thief's presence?**

The *missile* or *missiles* from the *magic missile* spell in your example would strike the fighter, because the fighter is the spell's target. Whether the invisible thief is revealed is entirely up to the DM. The *missiles* might streak directly toward the fighter and turn abruptly to avoid the thief, or they might curve so gradually that nobody notices. Even in the first instance, the *missiles* might move so fast that an observer wouldn't notice them changing course.

In any case, the thief is not rendered visible, there is simply a vague indication that there is something invisible in the *missiles'* path. This situation is similar to what would happen if the thief jostled a piece of furniture or a curtain. If the DM decides the *missiles'* erratic course could betray the thief's presence, any observers should attempt saving throws vs. spells. Observers making successful saving throws would detect the thief and know his approximate location, while observers failing their saving throws would notice nothing.

**According to what I have read, when a human and a half-elf mate, the offspring is considered a human; I've also read that, when an elf and a half-elf mate, the offspring is considered an elf. So what happens when two half-elves (or half-ogres or half-orcs, etc.) mate?**

The FORGOTTEN REALMS® Campaign Setting contains just such a rule about half-elven heredity. When two FR half-elves mate, their offspring also is a half-elf (see *A Grand Tour of the Realms*, page 12). The *Player's Handbook*, however, says that anyone with both human and elven ancestors is either a human or a half-elf (see *PHB*, page 30). If the character has more human ancestors than elven

ancestors, he's human. If there are equal or larger numbers of elven ancestors, the character is a half-elf.

Unless your campaign has a rule that says otherwise, I recommend that you use the *PHB* rule for half-elves and all other crossbreeds. If you're playing a FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, for example, use the rule from *Grand Tour of the Realms* when dealing with half-elves and the *PHB* rule for half-orcs and other crossbreeds.

**The description of the Charge option in the first chapter of the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Combat & Tactics* book says it's a full-move action: however, the Charge option also is included in the list of half-move actions on page 20. Which is it?**

Charging is a full-move action, but it's included on the half-move list for two reasons. First, it is possible that a charging character might enter melee range with the enemy during the first half of his movement. In such a case, the character stops moving and makes his attack; once he stops to attack, his movement is over (though he still can make the standard one-square adjustment after the attack). Second, it's okay to let a character who already has made a half move to charge during the second half of his movement. Players often wish their characters to make delayed charges in response to unexpected moves from the enemy, when their comrades suffer knockdowns, and in many other situations. A character making a "half charge" is subject to all the bonuses and penalties associated with charging (see *Combat & Tactics*, page 25).

**If you're using the fatigue rules from the *Combat & Tactics* book do undead creatures have to keep track of fatigue?**

No, they don't. This isn't mentioned in Chapter Nine of the *C&T* book, but it should be. Golems don't become fatigued either.

**Exactly how far does a character go when charging running, or sprinting? For example, Motar the mage has a base move of 12. That means he normally goes 12 spaces on a half move. He goes 36 spaces if he runs (12 plus 24) or 48 spaces if he sprints (12 plus 36). Right?**

Motar the mage, who has a movement rating of 12, normally moves 12 squares in a combat round, not 24 (see *C&T* page 13).

If he charges, his movement rate

increases by 1 ½ to 18. Motar can move up to nine spaces during his base initiative phase and up to nine more during a later phase (usually the very next phase).

If he runs, Motar's movement rate doubles and he can move 24 spaces (but no more than 12 during in base phase and up to 12 more on a later phase).

If Motar sprints, he triples his movement to 36 (up to 18 spaces in his base phase and up to 18 more later). Note that characters have only two phases of movement during a combat round and that leftover movement from a previous phase cannot be saved and used in a later phase.

**There is a contradiction between the descriptions for caps and mail coifs in the *Combat & Tactics* book. Page 147 says the two provide Armor Class 3 for the head and neck when worn together, but page 149 says the combination provides Armor Class 4. Which is correct?**

A cap and mail coif worn together provide an AC of 4 to the head and neck.

**What kinds of things can affect a weapon's speed factor? Do you include things such as an elf's or a specialist's attack bonus? Can a speed factor be a negative number?**

The only thing that affects a weapon's speed factor is its magical enchantment. In core AD&D 2nd Edition rules, each point of enchantment reduces the weapon's speed factor by one point (see *PHB*, page 127). If you're using the initiative system from *Combat & Tactics*, see page 18 of *C&T*: A weapon's speed factor can never be less than zero.

**The rules for critical hits in Chapter Six of the *Combat & Tactics* book say that armor damage can be avoided if the piece of armor in question makes a saving throw vs. normal blow or vs. a crushing blow if the attacker's weapon is larger than the defender. What are the saving throw numbers for a normal blow?**

There is no "normal blow" category for item saving throws in the AD&D 2nd Edition game. For purposes of critical hits, I recommend a saving throw number of 2 for normal blows no matter what type of armor is involved. For crushing blows arising from critical hits, I recommend a saving throw number of 6 for all types of armor rather than the numbers given for crushing blows on Table 29 in the *DMG*. Don't forget that the damage inflicted by the hit (before

any multipliers for the critical hit) applies as a penalty to the armor's saving throw roll.

**Is there a system for determining character point costs and initial ratings for nonweapon proficiencies that were included in the various "complete" handbooks but not included in the *PLAYER'S OPTION™: Skills & Powers* book?**

No, there isn't, but here are a few basic rules of thumb for you: A one-slot proficiency should cost three character points. If a one-slot proficiency allows add-ons (such as the ancient languages proficiency, which allows the character to learn additional languages for a minimal character-point cost) or is something particularly difficult to learn (such as mountaineering or tracking), it should cost four character points. Fairly common or simple one-slot proficiencies should cost only two character points. Two-slot proficiencies should cost five character points.

Initial ratings should range from 5 to 9; compare the proficiency in question to the proficiencies already included in the *Skill & Powers* book and assign one that seems appropriate.

In any case, the task of converting an old proficiency to the *S&P* system is a job for the DM, who has final say on the process.

**How many spellbook pages are required to include the reversed form of a spell?**

It depends on the spell. Reversible spells, such as *knock*, *locate object*, and *stone to flesh* require no extra spellbook space at all. A single spell entry does double duty, though the wizard still must decide which version he will memorize when studying spells for the day. Separate spells that are essentially reversed versions of each other, such as *haste* and *slow*, must be recorded separately. In either case, a single spell requires a number of spellbook pages equal to the spell's level plus 0-5 (1d6 -1) pages (see *PHB*, page 63).

**If a specialist wizard uses a magical item from an opposition school, such as a transmuter using an *amulet of proof against detection and location* (abjuration magic) what happens? Can the transmuter use this device at all? Is there a penalty?**

As "Sage Advice" has suggested before, specialist wizards should be free to use all magical items that can be used

by any character class, even when they involve magic from their opposition schools. The specialist wizard magical item limitations are intended to apply solely to wizard-only items.

**How many years does a character age per level of experience gained? I hardly think that a truly seasoned warrior (20th level or higher) would be only 25 to 30 years old. After all, the true greats, such as the wizard Elminster are depicted as elderly.**

The first step in determining any character's age is to generate a starting age from Table 11 in the *PHB*. Now, divide that value by the absolute maximum age for the character's race (also determined from Table 11). Multiply the quotient by the character's actual maximum age (again from Table 11). This is the character's "geezer factor." If person playing the character is past middle age himself, double the geezer factor (everyone knows time passes faster for older people). If the person playing the character is a game advice columnist who has begun to ponder just how many people there are out there who just have to have a rule for everything, triple the geezer factor (because thoughts of this kind will make you old in a real hurry). In any case, for every 50,000 experience points the character earns he ages one geezer factor.

There you go, simple. Go try the formula on a couple of sample characters to see how it works. I'll wait. . . .

Have you done that? I hope not, because the Sage was just pulling your leg.

How about this as an alternate method: Determine the character's starting age (Table 11 again), and then figure out how much time has gone by in the campaign since the character started play. (Pretty clever, huh? That's why I get the big bucks.) If you need help with campaign time, check out Chapter 14 in the *Player's Handbook* and Chapter 14 in the *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*. Of course, if you asked your question because you're creating a new character at level 20 or higher, just make him whatever age you want him to be. If you think 25 to 30 years old is too young, you're probably right. To set the character's age, start by thinking about how much game time it might take to gain 20 or more levels (if you haven't any idea, you probably shouldn't be creating characters of that level). Now consider any notable events from the character's past (you weren't

really going to create a brand-new character of level 20+ without giving him a history were you?). For example, if a 20th-level warrior's claim to fame was that he lead the imperial army to victory 50 years ago, he's almost certainly going to be considerably more than 50 years old; after all, babes in diapers usually don't command imperial armies, but then again anything's possible in a fantasy game and there's always the chance the character has been subjected to some kind of magical age adjustment.

In short, there is no hard-and-fast rule governing how fast characters age once they start play, it's all a matter of judgment (and perhaps a little bookkeeping) on the part of the Player and the DM.



*Skip Williams is a game designer and editor at TSR, Inc. Questions for the Sage can be sent to him at the address at the head of this column.*



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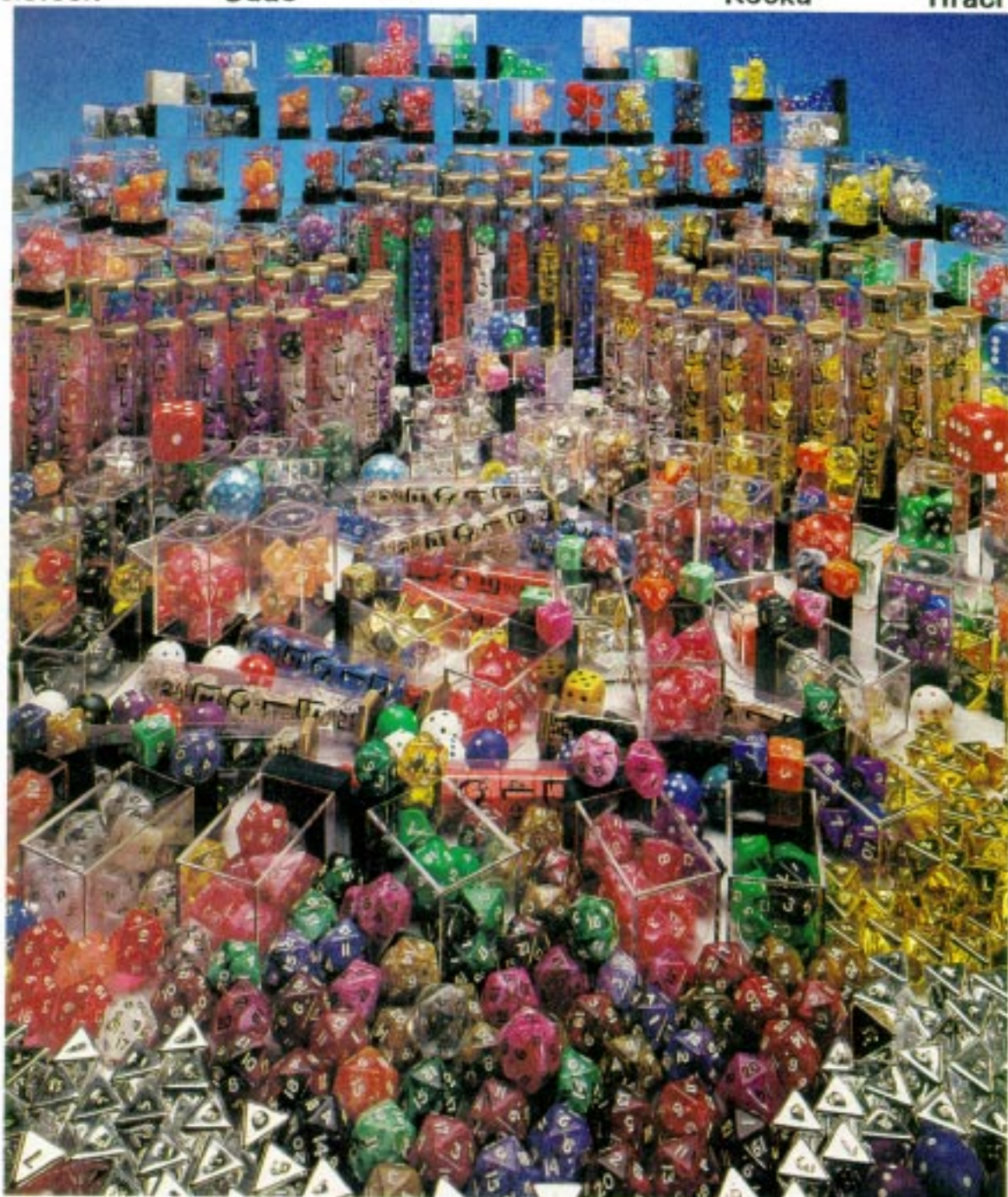
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# THE ROLE OF BOOKS

## Master the Magic

by John C. Bunnel

This month's column is a departure from the norm. Since I reviewed *Mustering Magic Curds* a little while ago, a host of additional strategy guides have sprung up in its wake. The result is a major challenge for the prospective buyer — which books are valuable and which are merely confusing? The following reviews should help players (as well as would-be players) of Magic: the Gathering\* determine which of these volumes, if any, may help them better play and understand the game

### ***The Pocket Players' Guide for Magic: the Gathering — Fourth Edition***

Various authors  
Wizards of the Coast

\$7.95

Strictly speaking, the *Pocket Players' Guide* isn't a strategy guide. Rather, it's a rules encyclopedia, a rough equivalent to the AD&D® system's *Player's Handbook*. And given the complex nature of the Magic rules, it's an essential volume for serious players of the game.

The strengths of the *Pocket Players' Guide* are that it's authoritative, and that it's thorough. There's no substitute in a serious rules argument for the official WotC-produced rules documentation. While no printed book can ever hope to keep completely current with a game that evolves as quickly as Magic does, this one comes closer than any other volume. And the new edition has been significantly expanded. Two notable addi-

tions are a complete list of Fourth Edition cards that includes notes on cards whose text and play-effect have been altered over time, and vastly expanded coverage of variant rules for multi-player and league games. The glossary of terms has also been substantially revised and expanded.

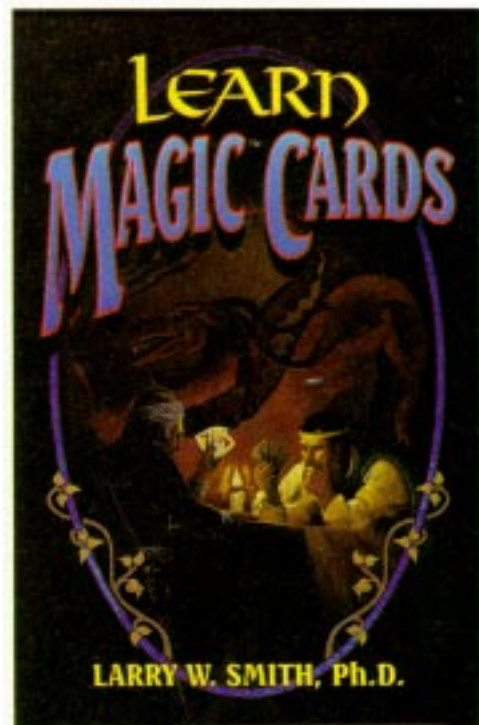
Another addition is a compact section that actually does focus on strategy. Paul Peterson contributes advice on basic deck construction, and *Duelist* puzzle-crafter Mark Rosewater gives basic advice on identifying and using card combinations. Both articles are clear and well-presented, but neither will take a reader much beyond the most basic concepts.

Where the *Pocket Buyers' Guide* falters is in bringing all this material together. The book is structured and organized like a reference work — specific sections cover specific topics, so that readers can best find answers by looking up a particular article or entry. But the writing and graphic presentation don't match this model. Rather, the written material tends to be conversational in tone, and the visual design seems geared toward the idea that readers will start at the beginning and read through to the end of the book. At the same time, each new section is written by a different author, and the continuity between sections is therefore thin to nonexistent.

That said, it's important to note that most of the individual sections are well-written and clear — or as clear as the Magic timing rules ever get. There is, unfortunately, an exception — the annotated rules themselves. Here, the emphasis on a reader-friendly tone comes at the expense of a narrative that rambles and wanders far too much. In particular, the imaginary commentators Selene and Mathias are a distraction and a crutch. While the information conveyed in their "side comments" is often useful, it's buried in a blizzard of italics — and the italics don't stand out very well from the ordinary type. A thorough, comprehen-

sive reworking of the core rules would have been far clearer, and probably more concise.

The *Pocket Player's Guide* as a whole is indispensable — the extensive annotations to the Fourth Edition card list are an essential asset in and of themselves, and its \$7.95 price tag makes it a solid value. But it's a peculiar hybrid, part encyclopedia and part guidebook, and as a result it stops well short of being definitive.



### ***Learn Magic Cards***

Larry W. Smith, Ph.D.  
Wordware

\$9.95

Magic is sufficiently complicated, and sufficiently intimidating to the uninitiated, that a guidebook aimed specifically at brand new players is an alluring prospect. *Learn Magic Cards*, however, is emphatically *not* that book.

It is, in fact, a little frightening to imagine this book in the hands of a novice duelist. The problem isn't that Larry Smith's writing is murky or unclear — for

the most part, Smith does a good job of addressing his text to readers unfamiliar with the often-arcane terminology of the game. The trouble is that a startling amount of the information he gives is demonstrably wrong.

It's not as if we're talking about ordinary typographic errors or proofreading slips. The mistakes are fundamental, basic inaccuracies, and some of them crop up over and over. For example:

"Cards can be purchased in Starter Decks of forty. . . ."

Smith makes this error twice; he seems to have confused the 60-card starter deck with the 40-card minimum required of playing decks.

"You must have creature cards in play in order to attack and cast spells on your opponent."

This assertion shows up in several places, including a sample duel. Never mind that it contradicts the very principle of "direct damage" cards such as Fireball and Disintegrate, and would render "creatureless decks" impossible.

Smith mis-defines terms; contrary to his definition, a "token" does not necessarily represent a card, and most spells which affect creatures or permanents will affect token creatures such as those created by many Fallen Empires cards. He also mis-states important game concepts, most notably that of tapping cards: in Smith's examples, you play creature cards and then tap lands to "release" mana, precisely reversing the correct sequence of events. And he mis-describes cards; in a discussion of upkeep costs, he refers to Throne of Bone and Pestilence, both of which feature activation costs but require no upkeep.

The result is one of the strangest sample games imaginable, wherein Smith's explanations rely on his misread rules — and, even if accurate, would cause his imaginary players to run afoul of other game rules. One player fails to put a creature in play despite having the land available to do so, and her opponent fails to launch a creature attack given the legal opportunity. And though Smith's narrative says that both players add mana to their mana pools without spending it (he's wrong; they play land cards but don't tap them for mana), he doesn't make them endure mana burn.

What's most frustrating about this is that Smith's organization and presentation of his material is smooth and logical, and does a good job of avoiding jargon. To judge by the prose style alone, the

book looks like an excellent beginner's guide. The level of inaccuracy in the text, though, more than counters the clean wordcraft, rendering the volume useless for all practical purposes.

If Smith's publishers thoroughly re-edit and re-issue a corrected version, **Learn Magic Cards** will be well worth a novice duelists time. Until and unless that happens, however, prospective readers should stay well clear of the book.

### ***The Unauthorized Strategy Guide to the Magic: the Gathering Card Game***

Gregg Williams and Paul Dreyfus  
Prima Publishing \$14.95

**The Unauthorized Strategy Guide** is easily the most polished and visually attractive of the Magic strategy guides presently available — no surprise, given that Prima Publishing is a veteran publisher of strategy books for computer games. But it's not just a good-looking volume; authors Gregg Williams and Paul Dreyfus have put together a reliable, entertaining guidebook aimed at novice players of the game.

Actually, their focus is a touch narrower even than "novice players". The introductory material advises readers that the book deals only with the Fourth Edition core card set, avoiding discussions of out-of-print cards and expansions. That's neither surprising nor unreasonable; what's more striking is the authors' choice to focus exclusively on pure game play, rather than trading strategy and tournament competition. The result is that **The Unauthorized Strategy Guide** is the one manual on the market to treat Magic as a family-oriented card game, something you can play and enjoy without ever poking your nose into a game shop.

That's an intriguing concept, but it does mean that more sophisticated players are likely to find the book of limited value. The authors steer readers firmly, if politely, away from playing against card sharks with Mox-and-Lotus decks, provide virtually no advice on the art of card-trading, and give only very brief attention to tournament play. This last is perhaps the most significant omission, as it means that the deck-design chapters entirely bypass the matter of constructing and using sideboards.

What the book does cover, though, it covers clearly and in well-organized fashion.

Combat and timing, the two most complex elements of the game, are discussed clearly and at length, and the introduction to deck construction gives impressive, step-by-step attention to the process. Williams and Dreyfus don't just say, "These are good cards for a direct damage deck," they stop to explain why they've taken out Earthquake and added Power Sink. The material is cogent and thoughtful, yet accessible, no small accomplishment considering the complexity of the subject matter.

Another plus is that the authors are quick to refer readers to other sources for material not addressed in their own work. Magazines, Internet sites, and other resources are all cited in various contexts, and alertly evaluated in an appendix. There's one impressive glitch, however: the phone number given for WotC's customer support line is actually a mis-typed version of WotC's business number. In compensation, there's also an e-mail address in the introductory material where readers can write to receive corrections and updates to the book.

Prima Publishing also gets high marks for the books' crisp, easy-to-read visual design. Unlike many of its competitors, **The Unauthorized Strategy Guide** doesn't try to cram every bit of text possible onto each page, nor are the annotated card lists squashed into the smallest possible space. The full-page art that accompanies various combat examples is cartoonish compared to the actual card illustrations, but as a whole the book is remarkably pleasing to the eye.

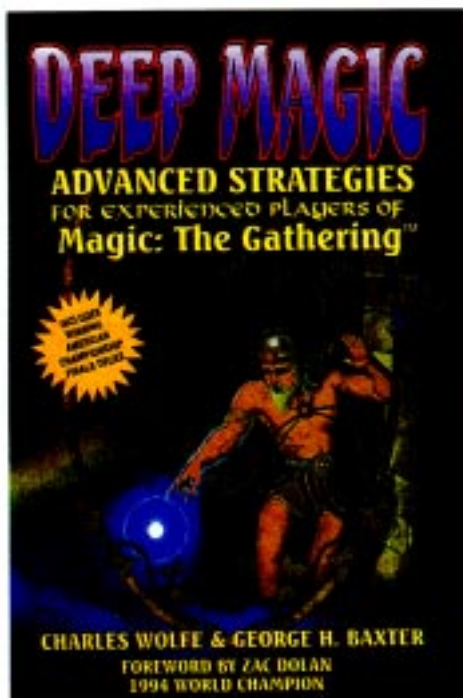
Duelists who are already familiar with Magic are likely to find Williams' and Dreyfus' book too basic to help them improve their game-playing skills. As an introductory volume, **The Unauthorized Strategy Guide** is a winner, and a treatment of the game that's especially well-suited to casual players.

### ***Deep Magic***

Charles Wolfe & George H. Baxter  
Wordware \$14.95

The intended audience for **Deep Magic** is something of a puzzle. While the cover and introduction clearly indicate that it's a book for "advanced players", one comes away from the volume with the distinct suspicion that there are two sets of "advanced players" in the world — those who have already built a playing deck much like one of those authors Wolfe and Baxter describe, and those





who wish they had the cards to build such a deck.

The book's stated focus is on deck design and construction, and its strong suit is an extensive discussion of the principles and theory involved in build-

ing strong and competitive Magic decks. At least to this extent, the volume delivers what its promises.

Unfortunately, the authors fail to make a smooth transition from theory to application. The theoretical material is concentrated in the first half of the book, while the second half consists of listings for and brief comments on a number of powerful playing decks. The result is akin to reading a book on golf and then watching the Masters tournament on TV — you learn what skills the game requires, and watch experts in those skills play the game, but you get very little help in learning to use such skills yourself. What's missing is a sense of process, a practical demonstration of deck-construction in action.

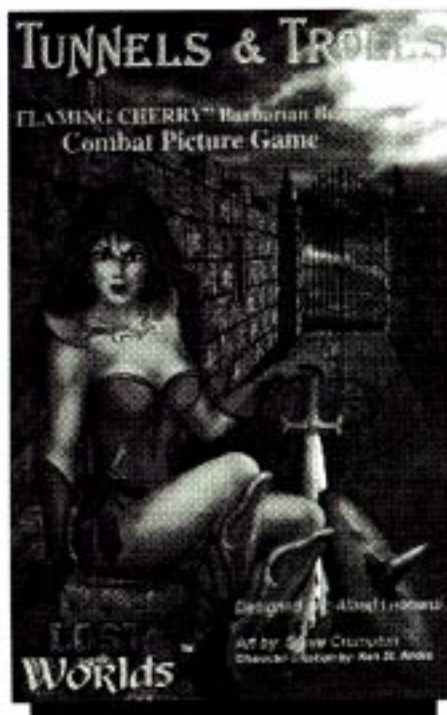
There's a further complication as well: though the book describes 28 different sample decks, including four finalists from the U.S. championship tournament, there's a distinctly repetitive character to the card selection. The emphasis is clearly not on "make best use of the cards you have", but rather on "if you don't have these cards, you're toast". Rare and specialty lands are a particular feature.

This is, in fact, *Deep Magic's* critical

weakness. It's telling that an average player with a 1,500-card collection (yours truly, for instance) may well not be able to assemble a single one of the sample decks the book describes, and the book simply doesn't teach the "card sense" to allow that player to build decks of equivalent potential with the cards he or she does own. While Wolfe and Baxter assert that "you do not have to possess an expensive collection to construct powerful tournament decks", the decks they describe clearly come from expensive — or at least well-tuned — collections.

Which takes the discussion back to the question of audience. Players who own the cards to build *Deep Magic's* sample decks either don't need this book, or will go straight to the appendices and skip the high-powered theoretical discussions. Players who don't can wade through the theory — but without either the "power cards" or the card sense to make best use of the cards they do have, they won't be able to apply the knowledge. Wolfe and Baxter have produced a book that's interesting, but not one that's especially useful.

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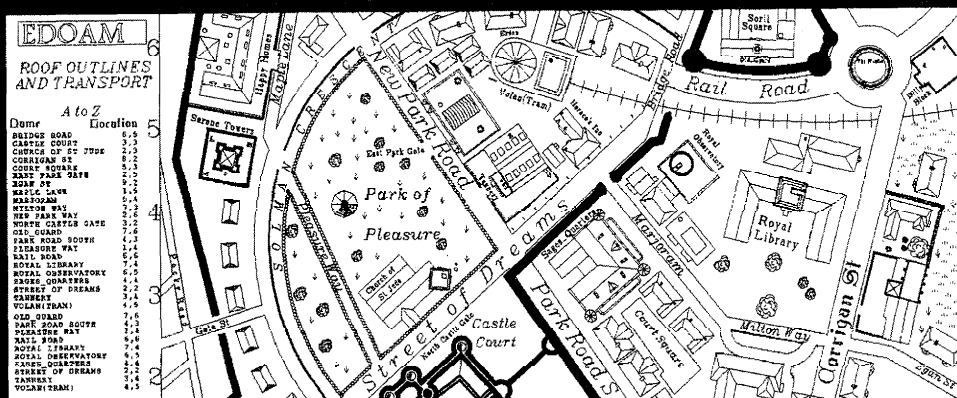


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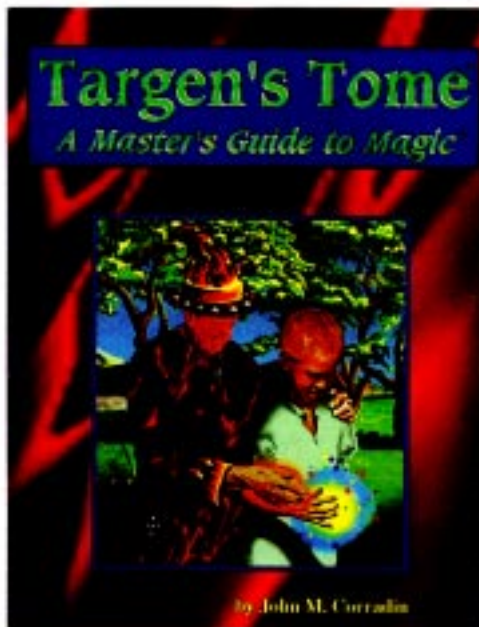
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## Targen's Tome: A Master's Guide to Magic

John M. Corradin  
Chessex

\$12.95

*Targen's Tome* is decidedly rough around the edges. John M. Corradin's writing is irreverent and unpolished, and

the book's typography likewise tends toward the informal. But there's a good deal of sensible advice and useful information in Corradin's guidebook, and his playing philosophy combines a healthy respect for Magic's traditionally powerful cards with a refreshing interest in keeping the game entertaining.

There's a bit of everything in Corradin's book — in addition to brief how-to-play information, deck design advice, and a selection of sample decks, *Targen's Tome* includes an introductory section on types of Magic players and extensive lists of popular or effective cards and card combinations. Also provided are a modest glossary and a concise summary of the cards added and subtracted from the core card-set in the course of the game's evolution.

It's the section of "top ten" lists that gives the volume its punch; Corradin runs through the core set and all the expansions, ranking the most useful cards in each and giving descriptions of their effects. More lists describe two and three card combinations, using both classic cards and material from more recent releases. While the commentary isn't

exhaustive, the effect is to give readers more complete, specific information on the total range of card types and effects than any other guidebook available. New tournament restrictions have rendered a few of the listed combos unplayable, but Corradin's cheerfully stated opinions nonetheless provide an excellent sense of the game as it is — and should be — played.

The sample deck designs, like those in *Deep Magic*, suffer a bit from an emphasis on rare and out-of-print cards. But there's more variety here than in the Wolfe/Baxter book, and Corradin's stated bias against card-denial strategies means that his offerings suffer much less from the recent restriction of Black Vise.

Corradin isn't an elegant or ornate writer, and his informal, often humorous tone won't appeal to some readers. Nor are the fantasy segments featuring the would-be master wizard Targen particularly distinctive. But it's clear throughout *Targen's Tome* that Corradin is enjoying himself, and that attitude goes a long way toward overcoming the occasional typo or ill-chosen word. This isn't a book for mono-maniacal tournament gamers, nor one for those needing expert rules advice, but amateur duelists with an interest in broadening their knowledge of the game should find Corradin's tome an enjoyable and valuable asset.

John C. Bunnell lives, writes, and loses at Magic in Portland, Oregon, in an apartment containing too many books and too few bookcases. Correspondence regarding "The Role of Books" can be sent to him at 6663 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Hwy. #326, Portland, OR 97225-1403.



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# Network News

by Scott Douglas

**W**riting tournament modules for the RPGA® Network is a very effective way of learning two important things: how the game industry works, and how to write well. Many industry professionals got their first valuable experience by writing adventures for the Network. Longtime Network authors like Kevin Melka and Jean Rabe were hired by TSR for their writing talent. West End Games spotted member George Straiton. Wizards of the Coast employs Network authors Mike Selinker and Teeuwyn Woodruff. Longtime member Jackie Cassada has a novel just released by the White Wolf Games Studio.

What do these individuals have in common?

All these writers have demonstrated a dedication to their craft, to improving their writing with every attempt. To do this, they've devoted a part of every day to writing. They've learned how to work with a professional editor, how to accept criticism, how to write to a company's format.

They've also learned to finish their work. Many fans of role-playing game systems have ideas about what constitutes a good game product. Some of those fans have excellent, publishable ideas. What frequently separates a professional game designer from an amateur is that a professional finishes what he begins.

Most importantly, these writers have learned exactly how to get game companies to look at their work. Most game manufacturers and periodicals won't accept unsolicited manuscripts. These individuals have shown that they can be trusted with an assignment. In many cases, they've built that reputation with a track record of writing fun, interesting, and solid Network tournaments.

How do you get to write for the Network?

You begin by finding out what the

Network looks for. You also need to find out how material must be written. A copy of the Networks tournament writing guidelines is available from Network headquarters; you can obtain one by sending a SASE to our Lake Geneva address. The guidelines also include a disclosure form, which you must fill out before we can even look at your submission. Briefly, the form says that the author has allowed us to consider the work and that the work is original. The form also limits our use of the material without the author's approval. This protects both parties, author and publisher.

The Network accepts tournament submissions in over a dozen game systems.

AD&D® scenarios are most in demand, but we get a fair number of requests for tournaments for games from companies like FASA, West End, Chaosium, R. Talsorian, and Mayfair. New game companies are often very excited about getting a sanctioned tournament for their game systems. Network-sanctioned tournaments provide these young companies with a chance for needed convention exposure.

Ingredients in Network tournaments vary, but generally an author needs to provide six completely pre-generated characters and an exciting adventure to challenge those characters. Tournaments run four hours, and so six to eight

*Continued on page 61*

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# Bazaar of the Bizarre

## Dwarven Magical Items

by Robert S. Mullin

illustrated by Michael Scott

In the field of magical-item manufacture and fabrication, the dwarven race is often overlooked. Humans and elves receive most of the credit for the creation of magical items, for they can be wizards, and wizardry and magical-item construction are closely intertwined. But priests create magical items as well, and dwarves can be priests. Why then are dwarves not considered when the topic of magical-item production is discussed? It probably has something to do with how dwarves are perceived — after all, dwarves don't like magic, and magic doesn't like dwarves.

This article attempts to change that perception — at least to some degree —

by providing a number of magical items manufactured with dwarven magic. This selection is by no means complete, for there are certainly many more dwarven-made magical items that are, as yet, unknown outside of dwarven society. DMs are encouraged to expand upon what is presented here as the needs of their own individual campaigns demand.

### Axe of Dwarvenkind

If magical *dwarven thrower hammers* are regarded as the most highly valued weapons of the priesthood of Moradin the Soul Forger, then *axes of dwarvenkind* are surely the magical weapons of choice among the clergy of Clangeddin Silverbeard. To most creatures, an axe of this sort functions as a normal *battle axe* +1, with a half-moon blade on either side of its haft. In the hands of a dwarf, however, the weapon's full powers are realized.

When wielded by a dwarf, an *axe of dwarvenkind* functions as a battle axe +3 which is immune to all forms of rust and corrosion (including acid, rust monster attacks, etc.), and is virtually impervious to



harm, saving as a +5 weapon.

When held and a command word is uttered, the haft shrinks and splits to form a pair of *hand axes* +2. These hand axes can be thrown to a range of 50 yards and will return to the dwarf automatically. (Note that despite certain similarities, the hand axes produced by an axe of dwarvenkind are not *axes of hurling* or *throwing*, and do not exhibit the abilities of those weapons beyond what is described here.) If used together in combat, the dwarf can fight with both axes in a manner similar to two-weapon combat. This allows the dwarf to throw both axes in a single round, throw one axe and strike with the other, or strike with both weapons in the same round. Thus, the hand axes effectively double the wielder's normal attack routine. Furthermore, the dwarf suffers no attack penalties when using the axes in this fashion, fighting as if both the ambidexterity and two-weapon style specialization were possessed. However, this form of two-weapon combat applies only if both hand axes are being used; the dwarf cannot substitute another weapon for one of the axes, as it is the magic of their simultaneous use that conveys this skill.

When at least one hand axe is held and another command word is spoken, the hand axes rejoin to form the battle

axe once more, even if one was lost (but not destroyed). Since the hand axes formed by a particular *axe of dwarvenkind* are attuned to each other, if one of the hand axes is destroyed, the battle axe cannot be reformed, even if a hand axe from a different *axe of dwarvenkind* is discovered. The only option is to forge a new twin for the remaining hand axe. Forging a new hand axe requires a master weaponsmith, who must be a dwarven high priest as well.

**XP Value: 4,000**

### Axe +2, Stonereaver

*Stonereaver* axes always take the form of a two-handed battle axe with a slightly curved cleaving blade on one side of the head and a long, chisel-point pick on the opposite side. The weapon is quite large, appearing cumbersome and unwieldy, but in truth it is perfectly balanced and weighs less than is suggested by its size. The balance of a *stonereaver*, however, is designed specifically for a dwarven wielder, taking into account the size, strength, and physique of that race. Therefore, *stonereaver* axes never function as anything more than a *battle axe*

+2 in the hands of nondwarves. In the hands of a dwarf, a *stonereaver's* true potential is revealed.

Against most creatures, the weapon inflicts the usual amount of damage for a two-handed battle axe (2-8/2-16 plus magical and, if applicable, Strength bonuses). When used against creatures composed of earth and stone (e.g., earth elementals, galeb duhr, etc.), a *stonereaver* is regarded as a +3 weapon and inflicts double weapon damage. And finally, a *stonereaver* acts as a *sword of sharpness* (with the full +3 bonus) when used against creatures composed entirely of solid rock (e.g., stone golems, stone guardians, juggernauts, etc.), enabling the wielder to sever the limbs and extremities of such creatures.

**XP Value: 3,000**

### Dwarven Warhelm

These large helms are favorites among dwarven warriors and priests. When worn by a dwarf, the *warhelm* conveys a +1 bonus to the wearer's Armor Class and adds 1 point to the dwarf's Charisma (but only with regards to other dwarves). When worn in battle (both



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large scale and one-on-one combat), other dwarves who can see the wearer of the *warhelm*, and are allied with the helm-wearer, receive a +1 bonus to ale, up to a maximum +3, in the case that multiple *warhelms* are present. Note that momentary obstructions or delays in battle do not cancel this morale bonus. (DMs must use common sense to determine what constitutes a momentary delay or obstruction as opposed to prolonged absence.) Finally, the dwarf who wears this headgear is absolutely protected from any form of mental contact, both magical and psionic.

If worn by any creature other than a dwarf, the *warhelm* confers only a +1 bonus to the wearer's Armor Class. In any case, all benefits imparted by the *warhelm* vanish upon its removal.

**XP Value: 1,000**

## Explode Stone

An *explode stone* appears to be nothing more than a fist-sized chunk of rock that has been sculpted into a rough, ovoid shape. Because of this shape, non-dwarves who find an *explode stone* often mistake it for a petrified egg or some kind of curio object. As its name implies, however, an *explode stone* is no simple trinket.

When held in the hand and the command word is uttered, the properties that give the *explode stone* its name become activated. Upon impact with any solid object or surface, whether the *stone* is thrown, dropped, hit with a weapon, and so forth, the device explodes with great force, spraying a 5'-radius sphere with razor-edged shrapnel. All creatures within this area must save vs. breath weapon or suffer 5d4 points of damage. A successful save results in half damage. Any creature in contact with the *stone* when it explodes, including a creature hit by a hurled *explode stone* (range, 1/2/3), does not receive this saving

throw, as such a creature is considered to be at "ground zero."

A second command word can deactivate an *explode stone* before detonation, but it must be held in order to do so. Obviously, it is unwise to carry activated *explode stones* for an extended period of time.

*Explode stones* are common additions to, and components of, the traps and defenses of dwarven strongholds. (A catapult launching a score of active *explode stones* into the ranks of an enemy army can be most effective!) Occasionally, activated *explode stones* will be left balancing on a ledge, shelf, or a similarly precarious location, ready to discharge against unwary opponents.

Although the *explode stone* is a dwarven invention, it is thought that drow, svirfneblin, and other subterranean races have developed similar devices for use within their own enclaves.

**XP Value: 500**



## Hammer of Battering

Hammers of this variety always are of a small, ornamental design and are not suited for the rigors of combat. They are usually constructed of various precious metals, studded with jewels and gemstones, and decorated with delicate engravings and inlay work. In essence, a hammer of *battering* is an exquisite piece of craftsmanship, worthy of any collection of art. Despite the fact that it is unfit as a melee weapon, its usefulness lies in the dweomer it carries.

When held in hand and the proper command word is spoken, a *hammer of battering* creates a *spiritual hammer* (as the second-level priest spell), which the holder can use to attack opponents. This power can be used once each day, by any creature invoking it.

When held by a dwarf, a *hammer of battering* can be used to create a *lesser guardian hammer* (see FR11 *Dwarves Deep*, page 38, for details) once a day, and *spiritual hammer* twice a day.

In the hands of a dwarven priest, a *hammer of battering* can be used to create a *guardian hammer* (see FR11 *Dwarves Deep*, page 39, for details) once a day. A dwarven priest may also conjure a *lesser guardian hammer* twice each day and a *spiritual hammer* three times a day.

Finally, in the hands of a dwarven priest of Moradin, a *hammer of battering* can invoke a *hammer barrier* once each day. A *hammer barrier* functions in all ways as the sixth-level priest spell *blade barrier*, but instead of inflicting slashing and cutting damage to creatures who pass through it, the *hammer barrier* delivers bludgeoning damage. A dwarven priest of Moradin may use the *hammer of battering* to create a *spiritual hammer* four times per day, a *lesser guardian hammer* three times a day, and a *guardian hammer* twice each day.

All of the noted powers operate at a level of ability equal to the user's experience level. In addition to those powers, a *hammer of battering* can be used with any spell which requires an actual hammer for a material component (e.g., *spiritual hammer*), but is not consumed by such use, and may be reused. Furthermore, it may be used as a holy symbol by priests whose normal holy symbol is a hammer.

It is generally believed that *hammers of battering* originated in the lands of Faerûn (in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting), but through the centuries, the process of their creation has passed to the dwarves of other worlds as well.



Ironically, the creation of such hammers on Toril has declined along with the dwarven population, making them extremely rare on that world.

**XP Value: 3,000**

## Hammer of Stunning

This weapon functions as a *war hammer* +2 when used in melee situations, but if an attack roll results in a natural 20, the target must save vs. paralysis with a -4 penalty or be stunned for 2-5 rounds, in addition to the usual weapon damage. Even if the save is successful, however, the victim is stunned for one round. Stunned creatures are incapable of attacking, spell-use, or any other actions short of personal defense (which imparts a penalty of -4 to the victim's Armor Class).

A hammer of stunning is heavy and improperly balanced for use as a throwing weapon. Therefore, it cannot be employed in such a way



unless the wielder is of Large size or greater, regardless of the user's Strength score. In

any case, the stunning power functions only if used as a hand-held weapon.

**XP Value: 1,000**

## Manual of the Forge

These rare works appear much the same as the countless other types of magical books, librams, manuals, and tomes. Despite its title, however, there are actually two versions of *forge manuals*. One involves the weaponsmithing profession and the other deals with the armorer profession. When found, there is an equal chance that a *manual of the forge* will cover either topic, though such a book never covers both subjects.

A *manual of the forge* can benefit any reader capable of acquiring the weaponsmith or armorer proficiencies, though it requires one month of study for a reader to grasp the knowledge contained within it. Once this period has elapsed, the *manual of the forge* vanishes forever. Thereafter, the reader is considered proficient in the subject to which the manual was devoted, just as if he had spent the proficiency slots necessary to acquire the skill under normal circumstances.

If the reader already possesses the proficiency in question, the knowledge provided by the book functions exactly as if the reader had spent an additional

proficiency slot in the same skill.

Like most magical books, a reader can benefit from a *manual of the forge* only once, though this pertains to the version used; a single reader can benefit from both versions, but not the same version more than once.

Although *manuals of the forge* are not necessarily of dwarven origin, or even more common among dwarves than among other races, metalworking is an integral part of dwarven society. Thus, *manuals of the forge* are extremely valuable to dwarves, perhaps more so than to any other race. And since the subject matter of these books are so important to them (not to mention the magical properties they possess), the dwarven race usually receives credit for creating such tomes.

**XP Value: 10,000**

## Oil of Corrosion Resistance

This magical oil may have been the result of the mixture of *oil of acid resistance* and *oil of timelessness*, for the properties of *oil of corrosion resistance* are somewhat similar to the effects of both oils.

*Oil of corrosion resistance* protects met-

als from all forms of rust, corrosion, tarnish, and the like. It may be applied to armor, shields, weapons, tools, dinnerware, door fixtures, chains, and so forth, but protects only the metallic parts of such items; it is useless if applied to other forms of material.

One bottle of *oil of corrosion resistance* is sufficient to coat a man-sized suit of plate armor, or a fraction thereof for smaller items. The protection bestowed by the oil lasts for a full week before wearing off, but during this period it is completely invulnerable to the corrosive conditions noted above, including rust monster attacks, acid and acid breath weapons, water exposure, etc. This magical *oil* does not restore metal that is already affected by rust or corrosion, though if applied to such metal, further rust and corrosion is suspended until the oil's protection expires.

Since dwarves rely so heavily on metallic weapons, armor, and tools, *oil of corrosion resistance* is a fairly common commodity in dwarven enclaves, particularly in mining communities, where damp conditions must be contended with on a regular basis.

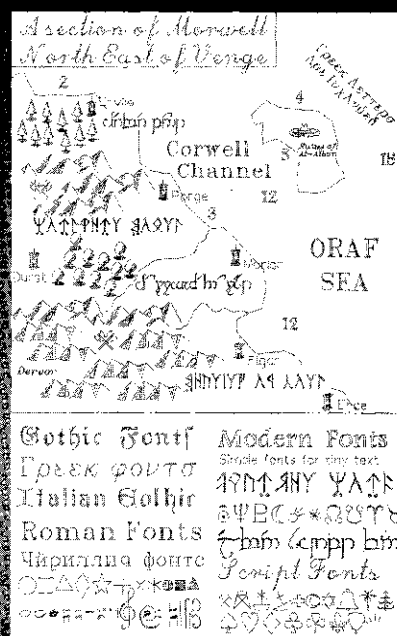
**XP Value: 500**

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## Oil of Sculpting

This magical *oil* temporarily alters the molecular composition of normal stone so as to make it as soft and pliable as clay.

One application (i.e., one jar; see below) is sufficient to affect one cubic foot of stone, allowing the rock to be sculpted and reshaped into whatever form the sculptor is capable of creating. The affected stone need not be in a cubic form, as *oil of sculpting* can be spread out over a surface area, such as walls, ceilings, and floors. Note, however, that spreading the *oil* in such a way reduces its penetration into the stone. For example, if spread over a 3' x 4' area of stone, etchings and engravings into the affected surface could not penetrate deeper than a single inch. On the other hand, if applied to an area only six square inches in size, the *oil* would permeate the stone to a depth of four feet. In any case, when the magic of the oil wears off, the stone returns to its usual hardness.

Obviously, this substance has uses other than for artistic purposes. It is especially useful in construction; softened bricks can be fit together without the need of mortar, and upon returning to normal stone, a structure built with such bricks will be far more durable than one which uses mortar. Other uses include the softening of castle walls (if enough of the oil is available), creating hand and footholds in cavern walls, excavating ventilation shafts, and the like.

The *oil* has no effect on stone that bears a permanent dweomer, be it a magically-protected wall or the rock of a stone golem. However, such a dweomer must have more than just a superficial relationship with the stone in order to prevent the *oil of sculpting* from affecting it; spells like *Nystul's magic aura* are not sufficient protection.

*Oil of sculpting* is thicker than most magical oils, having a syrupy, almost gelatinous consistency that inhibits its ability to pour very well through the neck of bottles, vials, or similar containers. Because of this, *oil of sculpting* is stored in small, wide-mouthed jars, allowing it to be scooped out and spread with a flat-blade knife or similar tool. Otherwise, *oil of sculpting* is like many other magical liquids, its softening effects lasting for 1d4+4 turns before the affected stone returns to its normal, solid composition.

XP Value: 500



Robert S. Mullin is a furniture finisher who lives in Perkasio, Pennsylvania. He is a frequent contributor to DRAGON® Magazine.

## Network News *Continued from page 55*

encounters should be written to completely engage each of the characters during that time.

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Scott Douglas is the RPGA® Network coordinator.

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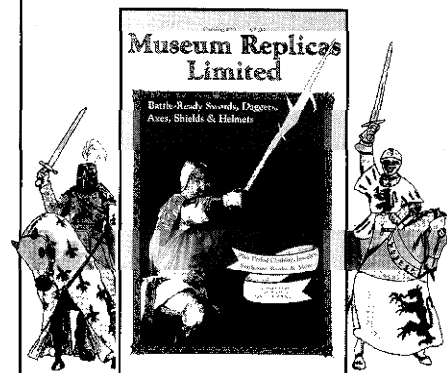


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# How to hide (and find) clues in a library

## They're in the Book

by John Baichtal

**S**ometimes an adventure hinges on finding a clue hidden in a library — a riddle, a command word for a powerful item, or a secret password. How can this be done so that the clue is challenging but not impossible to find?

The first thing to decide is how many books there are in the library. In medieval times, 20 books in one room was considered a major collection. Until the invention of the printing press, each book had to be copied by hand, and many were beautifully illuminated (hand decorated with colorful illustrations and scrollwork). These factors make each book a treasure. Thus, in campaigns where printing presses are unknown, even a major wizard's library would probably hold no more than a few dozen books.

This rarity makes it easier to conceal a clue among books — there are fewer places to hide it. Another factor to the PCs' favor is that libraries were often used by their owners as studies and lounges, increasing the chance that they would contain inadvertent clues.

The following are some ideas for concealing hints and clues in a library:

The PCs find a blotting sheet with recognizable words on it. Quill pens leave copious amounts of wet ink on the page, and a sheet of porous paper is often used to sop up the excess, leaving an imprint of the original. Of course, this sheet must be read in a mirror.



Some clues are hidden in the illumination of a book. For example, an illustration might depict a person opening a red door with a black key, and later on the party finds a red door — suggesting that they must look for a black key to open it.



The PCs find a poem written on an inside page of a book. The message or clue is either in the title, subject, or the text of the poem itself. Perhaps the poem is an acrostic, where the first letter of every line spells out a message.



A word or two has been scratched into the hardware or cover. The reasons for this can vary. Perhaps the book was owned by a famous person who scratched his name into the cover. This clue might give the party an idea of the book's origin and history.



The bookshelf is merely a front for a secret area. The books are dusty except for one that has been smudged. This book is the trigger that opens the secret door.



The PCs see a stain on a page, or something dusted on it. For example, a wizard suspected of brewing poisons might have a recognizable venom staining the cover, where he spilled a concoction.



A page is dog-eared, suggesting that the book is often turned to that page, where some sort of clue is to be found.



A book hidden among the others is a diary, ledger, or log containing ample clues as to the library owner's motives or activities.



There is a doodle left on a table in the library. This could be a whole word or maybe an idle picture that could give the party some critical clue as to what they are going to encounter on their adventure.



A page is torn out and may be found later. The party may notice the missing page and wonder about its contents. Finding that page could be a challenge in itself.



A book out of place in an orderly library holds the clue. The library is immaculate, with every book in a certain order (by subject, alphabetical by author, etc.). However, one book is out of order and contains the clue.



There is a *magic mouth* spell located in a book. Picking up or opening the book triggers it. The *mouth* speaks a riddle or a snippet of poem, and the party must memorize it unless they have writing material handy. Obviously, this sort of

clue has been left deliberately, perhaps by an ally of the PCs or enemy of the villain.



The PCs notice something written in the margin of a book's pages. Often, doodles and notes on the margins can give subtle clues, especially if the writer made them idly, not paying attention to what he was doing.



The book is upside down or carelessly placed on the shelf. The owner of the library was in a hurry when he hid something behind the book and accidentally put it back upside down.



The library owner owns books for status and appearance's sake and thus never reads them (they look brand new), except for one book which is noticeably worn. This book holds a clue.



The clue is in the form of a bookmark carelessly left in between some pages. It

could be a key, gem, slip of paper, or other oddity used to mark his place by the owner of the library, then forgotten.



PCs paging carefully through the book find that one word has been underlined. This is a command word or password and may be of use later in the adventure.



Runes on the cover contain a clue. These arcane letters, if deciphered, can be a valuable piece of information.



The book content itself is valuable information. For example, if the owner of the library is a wizard who created a magical jade door, a book on jade carving might give a hint as to how to open the door. A translator's dictionary might help the party if the villain wrote all his notes in Old High Gnomish.



The clue is actually a red herring. There is a false clue hidden in the library for the purpose of harming intruders. These could be traps or simple misinformation.



The clue may be left in the library unintentionally. For example, if there is a secret closet behind a bookshelf, the owner may be in the habit of bracing the door open with a book while he worked inside. The book would show signs of this use.



The key to concealing some vital bit of information in a library is for the characters actually to look for it. It should not be an hours-long process, and a reasonably intelligent party should be able to find the clue — but not necessarily understand its significance. In the end, the players must realize the clue's significance and usefulness.



John Baichtal lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is a frequent contributor to DRAGON® Magazine.

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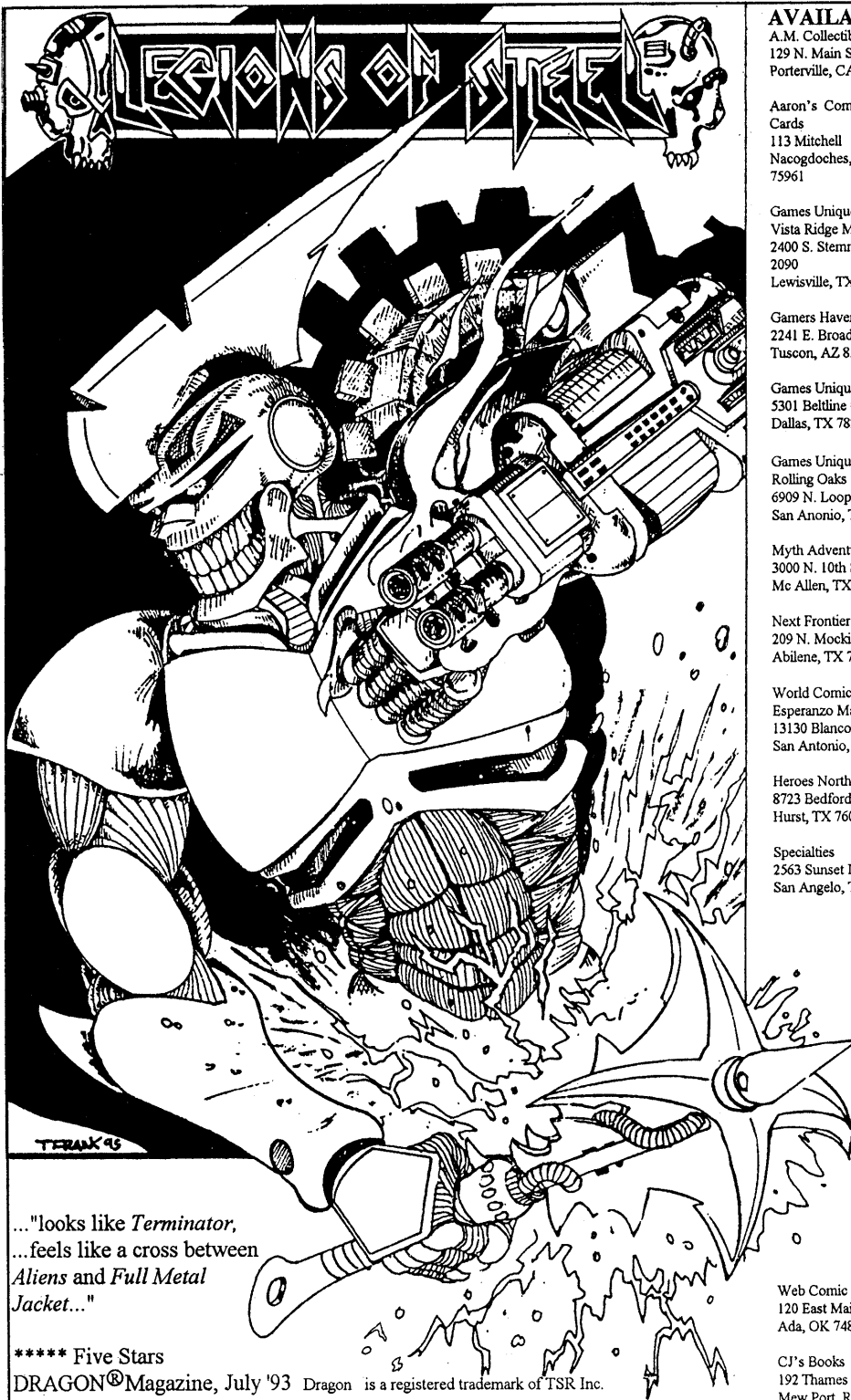
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# BLOOD WARS™

CARD GAME

## Tactics for Two

### The Official Two-Player Rules Supplement

These are the official two-player rules supplement for the BLOOD WARS™ card game. To play, you'll need the BLOOD WARS rule book and, of course, the cards.

These rules adjust the BLOOD WARS game for more responsive play for two players. When the card game was developed, the focus was on a multi-player game, and the game's design reflects that. Thus, we're here to make a two-player game as interestingly brutal as the multi-player games.

We've made these adjustments to various parts of the game, but much of it remains unchanged. That's why we're showing you only the sequence summaries and various appended notes about the rules changes. If a rule or restriction is not mentioned here, the rules haven't changed at all from the standard BLOOD WARS rules.

This rules supplement should add some new intensity to your BLOOD WARS games. Yes, they are optional rules, but they alter the strategies and the conditions of the game itself, making it better for two players and giving jaded players cause to rethink their take on the game.

Passages in italics explain the rationale for the new game mechanics.

by Steven E. Schend

### Player deck construction

A BLOOD WARS deck for two-player games needs some particular adjustments beyond the normal deck construction rules. Just as certain cards are restricted in tournament play, there are some cards that must be limited within two-player game decks. These card restrictions keep some cards from totally weighing the game in one player's favor.

Certain cards allowed in two-player games are restricted to one card per deck. This restriction is simply to keep play running smoothly and to prevent certain cards from totally unbalancing the game and turning it in one player's favor.

Other cards are too disruptive to smaller games, simply don't work outside of a multi-player game, or create unfair situations that cannot be balanced by normal game mechanics. They are banned entirely from play in two-handed games.

### Only one each per deck

**Legions:** Balaena, Shield Maidens of Odin; Conclave of Generals, Erosion of Faith;

**Fates:** the Mazes, Powers of Evil/Good/Neutrality Intervene (one of each maximum), Rest & Relaxation, Stolen Seat of Power.

### Banned from two-player games

**Battlefields:** River Oceanus, River Styx;

**Warlords:** Bahamut, Bel Regent of Avernus, Factol Darius, Factol Karan, Gwynarwhyf the Veiled, Lizard Lord; Loki, Marisa;

**Fates:** Assassination Plot, Battle Scarred Planes, Cavalry Rescue, Diplomatic Treachery, Key of Pain, Lost Comrade Returns, Mass Desertion, Peace Compact, Prime Summons IV, Prismatic Battlesphere, Wrath of the Gods.

### Player turn sequence summary

This adjusted summary lays out the game's turn and challenge sequences and shows where the game's rules change for two players.



## 0. Pre-game phase

**Set the Stage:** Choose game length (number of victory points [VP]).

**Mustering In:** Choose the Mustering Period (that is, the number of turns that will pass with no Challenges).

**Collect Forces:** Draw six cards. If the cards do not contain at least one Warlord, discard and draw another six. Repeat until you have at least one Warlord.

**Seize Initiative:** Draw for a random result number (RR) to determine which player is the first Acting Player.

## 1. Opening Phase: Reinforcements

Draw two cards into your Command Hand.

## 2. Assembly Phase

**Assembly Phase:** In the first turn, you should skip the Assembly Phase. The Assembly Phase goes on as normal during the rest of the game.

**Troop Formation:** Put Legions and Fate cards in Battle Hands (stack cards under Warlords on the table).

## 3. Action Phase

**Action Phase:** Skip the Action Phase during the Mustering Period, since no Challenges may be allowed during this time.

**Challenge:** Reveal Battlefield and type of Challenge. Then conduct the Challenge according to the Combat or Intrigue summary.

*For the sake of reduced opposition in a two-player game, each player gets only one Challenge per turn.*

## 4. Resolution phase

**Induct New Warlord:** Add one Warlord to the table.

*Multi-player games usually have enough Warlords to counteract the actions of any one Challenger. Since having two players means more limited opposition, new Warlords are placed out only one per turn. This allows neither player an overwhelming advantage if multiple Warlords appear in the first draw.*

**Regroup:** Unflip Warlords and Battle Hands.

**Cull the Weak:** Reduce Command Hand to seven cards.

## 5. Victory phase

**War Report:** The Acting Player wins if he possesses sufficient VP as agreed upon earlier in Phase 0; otherwise his opponent becomes the new Acting Player.

## Combat challenge summary

Combat proceeds as normal, as combat itself has always been a one-on-one measure.

## Intrigue challenge summary

**Flex Political Muscle:** The Acting Player puts forth a Battlefield to conquer and then presents a Challenger.

**Dissenting Opinions:** The opponent declares one Warlord to be the primary Defender against the Challenger.

*This change for two players introduces a new term of "primary" in regard to the Defender; this term will become important with the next rules alteration below.*

**Power Caucus:** Use the Warlords' Intrigue Powers, then Legions'. Use Fate.

**Generals' Poll:** The player having the Warlord with the lowest Intrigue Strength (IS) can call a Generals' Poll for additional IS bonuses. In a Generals' Poll, both players draw a card for each additional active Warlord they have in play and check the RR of those cards. (Flipped Warlords are, of course, inactive and so cannot be used in the poll.) If the RR of the card drawn for a Warlord is less than or equal to the RR of the player's primary Warlord, he draw another card and adds that RR to the primary warlord's IS.

If the drawn RR is greater than the primary warlord's RR, he draws another card for RR and adds the amount to the opposing warlord's IS.

After this adjustment, the Challenge proceeds to the Ballot step. Secondary Warlords do not flip like the primary Challenger and Defender when used in this minor capacity.

*The added step of the General's Poll in Intrigue allows the option of bringing additional Hidden Allies in through the "votes" of the other secondary Warlords. This new mechanic simply allows a Warlord who is hopelessly outclassed by his opponent's IS to have a chance of stopping him by Intrigue. Careful deck construction limits the risk of further increasing the opposing IS.*

**The Ballot:** Draw Hidden Ally (RR) for each side. Compare sides' IS totals.

**Bloodless Coup:** The successful Challenger takes the Battlefield. He draws one card for each Warlord ally he has.

*One reward card is drawn for each secondary Warlord from a Generals' Poll who added IS to the victorious Challenger. This reduced reward is the result of the limited support of the secondary Warlords.*

**Loss of Status:** An unsuccessful Challenger is flipped; any Legions and Fate in the Challenger's Battle Hand are

returned to the Command Hand. The player with the opposing primary Defender draws an RR to determine the number of cards he wins, and he also draws one additional card for each of his opponent's "allies" as a reward.

*With two players and the resultant fewer Warlords, the reward for successfully defending in an Intrigue Challenge had to change as well. Therefore, instead of drawing the number of cards equal to the Warlords on the winning side, the reward is identical to that for successfully defending against a Combat Challenge. In addition, the Defending player draws one additional card for each secondary Warlord who added IS to the Defender.*

Defending allies (i.e., secondary Warlords from a Generals' Poll who added IS to the victorious Defender) each earn one card for the player.

*This mechanic simply follows the BLOOD WARS standard: if you ally and you win, you are rewarded with cards. It is possible for either player to have votes go for and against the primary Warlord; therefore, each player should always draw a card from an Intrigue Challenge, no matter how the primary Warlord votes. The only exception is if all his secondary Warlords voted with his primary Warlord and he still loses the Challenge. This promotes quick movement through a deck and really speeds up deck recycling.*

**Lying Low:** Flip Primary Warlords (with their Battle Hands) that were used on both sides of the Challenge.

*This is simply a reiteration of the note above to make sure people don't needlessly sacrifice all their Warlords in one Challenge. The mechanics of the BLOOD WARS game always attempt to make certain that no single player has a distinctly unfair advantage over another player. Not forcing all Warlords to flip prevents one player from keeping his opponent on the defensive during the entire game.*

These few adjustments to the standard rules are all you need to make the BLOOD WARS game an exciting two-player challenge.



Official Two-Player Rules Supplement Original Game Design and Two Player Game Development by Steven E. Schend.

Project Coordination by Thomas M. Reid  
Original Game Development by Lester Smith  
Additional Aid & Development by Dale Donovan & Kevin Melka

*When heaven sent his knights to war  
the roses turned to stone.  
The shattered souls marched off their land  
and to the wind of death and pain  
all love and hope was blown.*

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Tales of the Fifth Age



# Mission from Kendermore

by Harold J. Johnson

## Part One

2 SE, early winter:

Malystrye, the Red Marauder, swept the Dairly Plains with her fiery breath. Then the dragon turned her attention West, toward Kendermore. While the hero Riverwind led the kender's heroic stand, a small team was dispatched to warn the outside world of the awesome threat. And of course, for kender, half the fun was getting there...

— from the *Chronicles of Nathal*, compiled in 31 SE

"You are my last hope."

The kender girl was still reeling from the words — Riverwind's words. The Hero of the Lance had chosen her to lead the mission!

She remembered the way the barbarian warrior's eyes had reviewed the crowd of kender as they assembled before him minutes ago, engaging in friendly bickering and joking. These ten had been chosen by Kendermore's ruler, Paxina "Stinging" Thistleknot, to undertake a crucial mission.

To her left Blister Nimblefingers saw Barker Mockingbird, who loved making loud proclamations. Next to him was an older kender who certainly did not fit his name: the bossy but clumsy Deft Stubbletoe. Their friend, stout Tucker Plentiful, everyone called "Tuckaway" for obvious reasons; when he wasn't eating, he was complaining about not eating.

Resourceful Kever Makepiece stood a bit apart, lost in thought as always. The bravest of the group Blister judged to be Dare Stoutheart. Myeki Thrillseeker, yawning nearby, had always seemed intelligent, though easily bored.

The women of the group stood to Blister's right. Bouncy Squirrel Stonefall looked every bit as energetic as her namesake. Crystal Dreamchaser, a shy girl of few words, seemed intent on her own imaginings. Blister was a bit nervous to see Pattifor Illfaring among the group. Her reputation for misfortune had earned her the nickname "Jinx."

Then Blister looked down at her own hands and felt ashamed. The small blonde kender had gotten into plenty of accidents of her own — culminating in the one some years back when she tried to open a mysterious chest and got her hands sprayed with acid from a trapped lock. Now her hands, hidden beneath leather gloves, were scarred and crippled, though still usable. The encounter had left the young kender with a new awareness of the value of caution and a new nickname: Blister.

And now she was to lead the mission! She replayed in her mind the memory of Riverwind quieting the group to tell them what he and his daughters had seen the day before, on the Dairly Plains just to the east. They had come all the way from Que-Shu to investigate rumors of a gigantic red dragon marauding in the area. What they found was a fierce, immense monster named Malystrix, who had laid waste to the entire eastern peninsula and was heading straight for Kendermore.

Now the famed warrior and his daughters, Moonsong and Brightdawn, were helping to mount the kender defense against the coming onslaught. But someone had to bring word to the Knights of Solamnia of the danger Malys posed — perhaps to all of Ansalon.

The sober message silenced the group as they considered the journey before them. Then Riverwind's gaze fell upon Blister. The veteran warrior looked into her bright, inquisitive eyes with approval. In her, the hero saw a sense of duty the equal of his own kender friend, now gone.

"Blister?" Riverwind had entreated her. "Will you lead the group safely to the Knights' headquarters on Sancrist Isle? You are my last hope."

The kender girl never hesitated. She nodded dumbly, and the Hero of the Lance smiled and clasped her hands. Then he pulled a cloth bundle from his doeskin shirt and handed it to her. "This is what coin I have. Buy passage to Sancrist from Ogrebond, to the northwest. Bring your message to Lord Gunthar."

He tousled her hair, then turned and walked away with his daughters toward Paxina Thistleknot's home. Blister smiled and turned to her charges. Nine kender voices rose offering advice. And so, amid the chaos, did the adventure begin.

\*

Ten times that bossy Deft Stubbletoe had challenged Blister's leadership. If not for Myeki and Dare backing her, she would have given up.

The plan was to cross Balifor to reach the port of Ogrebond and seek passage on a northbound ship. For their trek to Ogrebond, they carried only meager supplies and hoped to live off the land. Blister wanted to use the least frequented route, to avoid encounters with ogres. Deft favored taking the main road to Ogrebond. But, since all the roads were patrolled by marauding ogres (and mercenaries hired to hunt the marauders), the others agreed to Blister's path.

Now was the tenth time Deft contradicted her. Their path through the rocky barrens was blocked by a deep gorge with a river raging at its base. Luckily, they found a fallen pine bridging the gap. Blister suggested they cross the tree by walking the length of its straight trunk. But even with this obvious choice, Deft had to argue. Climbing across the side branches offered more handholds, he said. Idiotic! thought the exasperated Blister.

"Look Deft," she said for the tenth time, "The best way is straight across the middle. Don't carry on so." Myeki, Squirrel, Dare, and Kever nodded.

"That's your problem," Deft retorted, "You think only in a line. Down the middle you have to weave around the branches sticking up — you'd lose your balance! Across on the side branches, there is more to hang onto."

"He's right! Admit it!" sneered Barker, Deft's loud-mouth pal. "He's older and has more experience than you, little Blister."

Blister tried to compromise. "Look, what if we send someone to try my way first?" she suggested. "If one makes it safely, we can all go."

Deft and his friends grumbled, but they agreed.

Myeki crossed first, swiftly to show the others the way was safe. Dare went next, boldly, then Squirrel scampered nimbly across. Barker climbed across fourth, grumbling all the way, with Tuckaway waddling behind him. Deft watched, fuming.

Kevere lead the distracted Crystal across using a clever system of safety lines. Even Jinx made it across, though it took some cajoling at first.

"It's just as well," Deft had sneered when the nervous Jinx seemed reluctant to cross. "She's bad luck anyway."

"Maybe I should stay behind," Jinx sniffled.

"Heights make me so dizzy . . ."

"Nonsense!" Blister, glowering at Deft, thought quickly. "What you need is a good luck charm."

As if in answer, a shriek sounded overhead.

Looking skyward, Blister saw a crested blue kingfisher. What a well-timed omen! she thought. A feather drifted down, and she caught it in midair.

"Here we are!" She turned to Jinx. "Nothing luckier than a kingfisher's feather — it never touched the ground!"

Jinx smiled in relief, took the feather, and made it easily across the log.

Finally, Deft was the last one left. "Well?" Blister called out to him from the far side. "You coming or not?"

"Fine!" Deft spoke in curt tones. He started across the trunk, a pout on his lips. Then he paused halfway across, an impish spark in his eyes. I'll show them my way is best, he thought. With a smirk, he crawled out onto the fan of branches to his right.

Blister sighed. The tree shuddered as Deft leaped from each swaying bough to the next. Barker and Tuckaway laughed in appreciation of his performance. Myeki shook his head, and Kevere's eyes grew wide. He cried, "Careful! That jumping's loosening the tree. It'll roll!"

Even as he called out, the tree groaned and wobbled. Blister, not quite to the far end, pitched into the boughs. Deft cried out as the tree wobbled to his right. In desperation he bounded forward, one leap, two... and as he braced to jump to the boughs cradling Blister, the tree rolled!

In a flurry of flying needles, the great trunk moved a quarter turn. Deft grabbed desperately for a hold, dried needles cascading from his flailing grip. At the last moment his hands seized a forking branch, and he dangled high above the wild waters of the gorge.

Looking up, Deft saw Blister had gotten one foot wedged in the crook of a branch. She hung upside down, gasping. Deft felt little satisfaction that his nemesis shared his predicament. He felt a sudden stab of fear as his hands slipped but, with a wild grab, he caught a slender branch.

"Deft!" Blister shouted, "Catch my cloak! I'll tie off my end!" She whipped her cloak in his direction so that a corner dangled a foot above him.

"That'll never work!" he shouted. Nevertheless, he reached out and caught the cloak. But when he tugged, the cloak pulled free! His heart pounding wildly, he grabbed again at his former hold. The cloak fell into the white water below.

"You idiot!" he screamed. "You almost made me fall!"

"I told you to let me tie it off first!" she shouted back.

"Well, do something, Great Leader!" Deft shouted. "And make it quick — I'm slipping!"

"Let me get turned around," Blister offered. "Then you grab my leg and climb up to a better hold." Deft just grunted.

Above came excited shouts as the others tried to mount a rescue attempt, tying Kevere's cords into a longer one. Blister tugged at her foot. It was wedged tight. She reached up with one gloved hand and felt around. The shoe's lacing was tangled in the bark. With effort she worked her fingers under the lace and broke it just below the knot. With a powerful tug, she freed her foot and flipped over in a shower of needles.

The tree shuddered and threatened to roll again. As Deft tried to grab higher on the failing branches, Blister stretched her body down toward him.

Deft didn't hesitate. Without warning, he flung himself out and grabbed the foot she had just freed. His weight strained Blister's hold. "Climb! I can't hold long!" Her scarred hands were burning painfully from the strain.

"No, pull me up!" Deft demanded.

"Don't wiggle! That shoe's loose. Climb now or we'll both fall!"

"This is all your fault!" Deft shouted, dangling. He tried to grab higher on her ankle — but then, the shoe's lacing broke. The shoe slipped from Blister's foot, and Deft plummeted toward the raging waters. His final shout echoed up to the horrified group: "Blister!" Then he vanished into the waves.

With his weight gone, the kender girl's bough swung wildly. One of her crippled hands lost its hold, and she spun above the raging gorge that had swallowed Deft. "Here, grab hold!" cried a cheery voice, and a large bough bobbed into sight, bent down from above. Dizzy, she closed her throbbing



hands around the limb. It was solid and strong. There she hung, both hands squeezed tight, until the others fished their rescue line down to her and hauled her up.

She breathed in relief at her rescue, but Barker and Tuckaway were sullen at the loss of their friend. Blister grieved over Deft's loss, too, but she couldn't help thinking it served him right, the know-it-all. Anyway, she thought, he could swim. At the rate they were going, he'd probably beat them to Ogrebond.

Still, there was the matter of her rescue. When she tried to thank the kender who had pushed the branch her way, they all denied going back out on the log. Had she just imagined it? Perhaps, she thought. But maybe someone was watching out for us after all. Perhaps it was a sign.

\*

Nine men, let alone nine kender, were no match for the giant ogre guarding the narrow path just ahead.

The group had been hiding behind the boulders for an hour, baking in the bright sun, observing the path that narrowed to a ledge above a sheer cliff-side. The path presented no obstacle to the nimble-footed kender, but the gigantic ogre, with its heavy club, sitting smack in the middle of it certainly did.

"Hey, Twinkletoes," Barker taunted Blister. "Are we going to sit here all day getting sunburned?"

Blister eyed the sharp-tongued kender without answering. He hadn't had a nice thing to say since Deft was swept away in the river. She returned her attention to the ogre, one of the ugliest she'd ever seen. Strangely, he never moved, just sat staring out into the valley hundreds of feet below. To continue their journey, they'd have to get by him.

"Well, everyone," Blister inquired. "Any ideas?"

The group passed glances back and forth. Keverer looked up from scratching in the dust. "If I had a big lever and a good place to stand, I could knock those rocks down on him from above."

"Why don't we just attack?" Dare said bluntly.

"He could retreat around the corner and pick us off one at a time," said Myeki. "Maybe half of us could create a distraction to let the other half sneak by."

"We could climb past," added Squirrel.

Blister scratched her head. No plan seemed right. "Crystal?" Blister spoke to the quiet dark-haired girl. "What do you think?"

Crystal, staring off into space, said, "Why don't we just ask him what he wants?"

"Listen to her!" sneered Barker. "Walk up and ask him!"

Blister's brow furrowed. "That's not a bad idea."

She set down her battle club, then stood and walked onto the path. The others gasped.

The ogre, watching her approach, stood and hefted its club. Blister stopped thirty paces away. "Hello."

The ogre stooped, squinting to see the kender. Then a horrible snarl distorted its face and it made a sound like stones grinding. "WHAT YOU WANT, LITTLE RUNT!?"

Blister smiled her friendliest smile. "Just passing through," she said, "Hoping to continue north. And what brings you here?"

"THIS MY LAND, MY DEMAND!" it rumbled. "You NOT GO, IF YOU MY FOE!"

"Oh, not at all, sir," she grinned. "No harm meant. See? No weapons. We'd just like to pass."

"WE? WHO THAT BE?" The creature wasn't as dumb as it looked.

"Just comrades. We're headed to Ogrebond," Blister said.

The giant ogre scratched its head and picked at one ear, thinking. At last it offered, "IF THEY FRIENDLY, THEY PASS FREE. IF THEY NOT, THEY GET SWAT. It swung its massive club for emphasis. Blister breathed in relief and returned to the group.

"So? What's he want?" Tuckaway demanded impatiently around a mouthful of raisins.

Blister straightened. "He says this is his mountain. Only the peaceful may pass. We can't bicker in front of him, and we must leave our weapons behind."

"Right...and which ear did your brains leak out of?" retorted Barker. Tuckaway snorted.

"Take this seriously!" scolded Squirrel. "We should give it a try."

"That's ludicrous," said Tuckaway. "Without weapons we're defenseless."

"Well, I don't need a weapon to be brave," declared Dare. He tossed his chapak beside Blister's battle club and stood beside her. One by one, Myeki, Squirrel, Keverer, Jinx, and Crystal did the same. Tuckaway stood astonished, opening and closing his mouth like a beached fish.

Barker folded his arms, eyeing them with distaste. He gave a short laugh. "You think I can't be civil? Is that it? Just wait, I'll be so sweet you'll want to kill me." He threw his horn-club on the pile. Tuckaway harrumphed but grudgingly followed suit.

Thus they passed the ogre of Harmony's Way. As Blister made introductions, the kender came forward one by one, offered the creature some pleasantry, and moved past. Things went well until only Jinx and Barker remained.

As Jinx approached Blister, her eyes wandered over the precipice. Suddenly vertigo seized her. Fighting dizziness, she gripped her lucky feather and stood stock-still, eyes wide.

Now, Barker Mockingbird was never very patient. Frustration welled up in him, loosening his tongue. "Perfect!" he exclaimed. "I've been standing here pleasant for an hour, and don't tell me it isn't killing me. And then, when it's finally my turn, Miss Fortune freezes up!" Barker mocked the petrified Jinx. "Get moving, stupid! That feather's not going to grow wings and fly you along. Move, or I'll kick you on your way!"

The giant ogre's face darkened. It lifted its club menacingly and stepped toward Barker. Blister seized Jinx's elbow and propelled her down the path. "You NOT NICE!" the creature boomed. "PAY THE PRICE!"

"No! You're mistaken," Blister called. "I'm sure he meant it to be endearing. Right, Barker?"

"Riiight . . ." the kender slurred. "And the day I need your help is the day I'll be too dead to care! Come on, you moron, let's play tag!"

The giant ogre roared and swung its club. Barker dodged and flung several stone chips, which stung the creature like gnats. "Hey, too high, big guy!" the kender mocked, dancing toward the precipice. "Try again, my friend."

A thoughtful expression creased the giant ogre's face. With a mighty crack, it crashed its club onto the ledge and a huge slice of the mountain splintered free. "You NOT PAY? NOW NO WAY! YOU CAN'T COME. ME NOT DUMB!"

Sputtering with rage, Barker was cut off. He

howled his fury and made a mad leap across the gap for the new lip of the ledge, but it was too wide. Though his hands scrabbled for a purchase, the rock crumbled. In an instant he was tumbling into the valley amid a cloud of dust, rubble, and curses.

The other kender peered over the edge in dismay. "Why couldn't he just keep his mouth shut?" wondered Crystal.

Myeki clucked his tongue. "That's just the way he is," he said, shaking his head. "No creature's too big for him to bait."

\*

Eight and eighty feet. That was the shortest distance the kender, now several miles past Harmony's Way, could find from the clifftop to the ground. The cliff offered plenty of hand- and footholds, but its brittle surface seemed like a rockslide waiting to happen. At its base, a slope of broken shale provided unstable footing for one solitary fir tree with sickly gray needles.

Blister kneeled by the edge looking for the best path down. "It would be easy with a long rope," offered Squirrel.

"But we don't have one!" snapped Tuckaway, chewing on some dried apples.

Blister ignored him. "Kever, got any ideas?" she asked.

He squinted at the talus far below. "What do we have? Any cord, chain, rope, or belts?" The group rummaged through their packs and pouches. They



found two twenty-foot lengths of rope, five belts, a six-foot chain with a ring on one end, a dozen stockings, and some extra shirts.

The kender's makeshift rope worked better than planned, hanging just five feet above the ground. As the best climber, Squirrel picked her way down the fractured shale first. The knotted-together rope held securely.

"All right, who's next?" Blister looked around. Without a word, Dare grabbed the rope and slipped over the side. Twice he slid suddenly, but he wrapped one leg around the rope and slowed his descent. Squirrel held the end tightly. Winded but cheery, Dare waved encouragingly from the bottom.

"Tuckaway! You next," Blister decided.

Tuckaway was picking walnut meat out of the shells he had crushed. He looked up. "Oh, I don't think so," he gobbled through a mouthful. "How do we know it'll hold me? Squirrel and Dare are small." He popped another handful of nuts into his mouth. "Besides, you could use someone strong like me at the top in case the mooring pulls loose."

Tuckaway was really getting on her nerves, Blister decided. She wanted to order him to go down first, so they didn't have to put up with his complaining. But, rather than argue, she sent Myeki down instead.

Kevere, anxious to try his creation, went next. Then, Squirrel nimbly ascended to the midway point to guide mind-in-the-clouds Crystal past the more treacherous patches.

Blister went next, working her way slowly down the cliff with encouragement from Squirrel below and Jinx above. "Don't worry Blister," Jinx called as she braced the rope. "I'll be okay. I've got my lucky feather!"

"You and that stupid feather," spat Tuckaway. "If it wasn't for you, Barker would still be alive." The stout kender slapped the feather from her hand, and it floated over the cliff.

Jinx lunged to catch it. Her hand on the rope kept her from falling, but her foot loosened shards of broken shale. What began as a small shower of stone picked up momentum as it fell, until a cloud of rocks and dust poured down toward Blister.

At the base of the makeshift rope, Squirrel watched her leader slide down recklessly, looking desperate to avoid the deadly shower. She could see Blister wasn't going to make it. The quick-thinking kender planted her feet and swung the rope with all her strength, trying to launch Blister away from the tumbling rocks. "Jump for the tree!" she screamed.

Blister more fell than leaped into the boughs of the scraggly fir, the avalanche rushing past. Her head still spinning, the grateful girl looked down-

ward to thank Squirrel. To her horror, all that remained was an amber scarf crushed beneath tons of debris.

Somberly, Jinx and Tuckaway descended with little incident. The girl clutched her blue feather protectively and glared at Tuckaway, who wisely decided to keep quiet a while.

Although her gloves had absorbed most of the friction from her slide down the rope, Blister's hands still stung. She thought it a small price to pay for ignoring the inner voice that had told her to send Tuckaway down first. She wiped tears from her eyes. Next time she'd obey her instincts, she promised, gazing tearfully up to the heavens.

\*

Seven were all that remained. Seven journey breads would be barely enough to feed him, Tuckaway worried, let alone the others. The stout kender patted his growling stomach. His mother always said, put something in your mouth — it'll keep you out of trouble.

Dare and Myeki led their depleted numbers through a maze of stony hills and canyons. Most remained silent, thinking about poor Squirrel, Barker, and Deft. They hadn't come far, and they'd already lost three. How many more would not complete the quest?

Why had he agreed to this ill-fated adventure? Tucker muttered. The others neither trusted nor respected him and — worst of all — they wouldn't let him carry the food. True he was heavier than the average kender — "thick as a dwarf," his friend Barker used to say — but it was all muscle. He needed to eat to keep in shape. His mother always told him, bread was the fuel of life, and so were meats, cheese, fish, greens, nuts, fruits, and sweets; eat as often as you can, and life will be a raging bonfire.

"Wait up!" he huffed, waddling to keep up with Crystal and Jinx. They paused. "Don't you think it's time for a rest?" he asked. "It's not good to keep up this pace on an empty stomach, you know."

Jinx gave him a frown and stormed off, clinging to her battered kingfisher feather forlornly. Crystal stared at him with a sad, possibly charitable smile.

"Well, that was hardly called for," puffed Tuckaway. His stomach rumbled as if in response. This would have to stop now, he decided. He trotted to catch up to Blister. The kender had stopped at a narrow defile and had begun to thread their way through one by one, moving slowly through the tight quarters.

"See here, young lady," Tuckaway told her sternly. "We can't possibly continue until we've had a decent meal. Most of us are positively faint! You'll need us at our peak if we encounter red wolves,



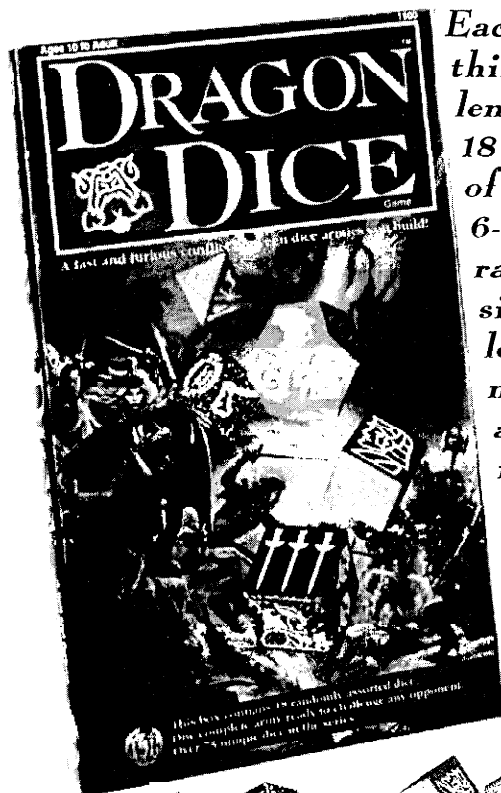


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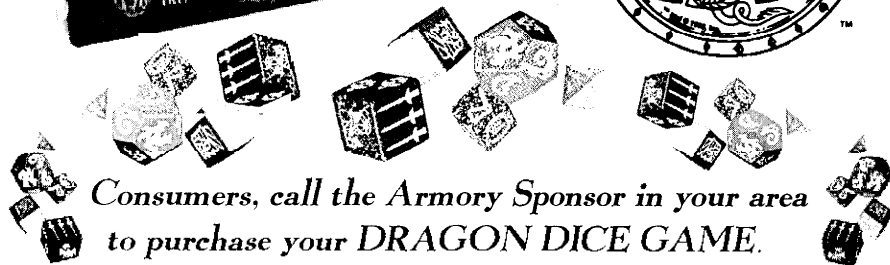
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more ogres, or worse."

Blister sighed. "Tuckaway, you'll have to make do on shared rations like the rest of us. We've a long journey ahead."

"Make do?" Tucker sputtered, "How can we be at our peak on one meal a day?"

Blister grimaced. "Look, if it will shut you up, I'll give you half my bread. If that's not enough, you'll have to forage. There are plenty of winter berries around."

Tuckaway grudgingly accepted the half loaf. His mother always said, half a loaf was better than none, and a bakery was better than a grainery. He ate it slowly, but his stomach was still not satisfied. It needed more.

He turned to search for nature's bounty. There were indeed mountain berries all across the slopes, though most were still green. Still, food was food, and he gobbled several handfuls, waving the others on ahead until he could finish his snack. He felt better, and set to planning how to get Crystal to share her rations with him next.

Tuckaway approached the crevice, which proved tighter than the others had reported. He had to take off his sling-pouch and drag it behind him. At last he saw the path widening ahead, just beyond a final narrow. The group was out of sight, and he hurried to catch up. Sucking in his breath, he squeezed his stout form into the last pass — and there he stuck, wedged tight as a cork in a keg.

He wiggled this way and that, but could not work loose. Then he shouted for help, but by that time his companions were too far away to hear. In fact, it was several hours before they thought to wonder why he had stopped complaining. By then, they had no idea what had become of him.

Tucker stood wedged in the pass, thinking for some time about his dilemma. When one can't do anything but stand, one tends to think a lot. At last, he decided this was exactly what he needed, a chance to lose a little weight. His mother had been right, he thought as the sun slowly set. She always said his big mouth would get him in an awful fix.

\*

Six kender and over a dozen hobgoblins — the odds were about even. Blister crouched in the brush at the hilltop surveying the crude camp below. To her right knelt Jinx and Kevere; to her left waited Myeki, Dare, and Crystal. She signaled for them to retreat.

"What do you think?" she asked when they were a distance away. The other five grinned.

"Hardly a challenge," smiled Dare, "if we were armed."

"Course, we had to leave our weapons behind

with that ogre," whined Jinx. Crystal nodded.

"Still, we need food," Blister said. "Those hobgoblins might have rations worth salvaging, if we could think of some way to get rid of them." The others agreed.

Kevere scratched his head. "I could make some slings and clubs," he said, squinting one eye in concentration, "but what we need is a diversion." His tongue stuck out one side of his mouth as he scratched plans in the dirt.

"What do you have in mind?" pressed Blister.

"Hmm?... er, well, you can't rush these things. Let me think." Kevere paced, talking to himself, "Necessity breeds innovation, you know. Perhaps we should scout the area. Now that's a plan."

Blister set Myeki and Crystal to gathering materials as the rest, under Kevere's direction, constructed crude clubs from branches and slings from strips of cloth and knee patches. Jinx filled two stockings with gravel to make a pair of saps. The foragers returned.

"Find anything interesting?" queried Blister.

"Not much," said Myeki, nursing a muddy poultice on one hand. "Just a bee hive in a hollow log."

"What?! A bee hive?" Kevere wriggled his fingers in the air. "That's the perfect distraction!"

"But you'd get stung to death before you could move it!" spouted Jinx.

"Maybe not." Kevere arched an eyebrow. "What if I rolled in mud to protect me from stings and pushed the log with a pole? Now that's a plan!"

"All right!" Blister decided. "Kevere, you and Jinx create the diversion. Dare and Crystal, you take the right side, and Myeki and I will take the left. When the log rolls into camp, we pick off any hobgoblins that run our way."

It was indeed a plan, and a fairly good one.

However, when the mud-coated Kevere leaned into his pole to lever the enormous log out of its depression, Jinx exclaimed — her feather had slipped from her grasp. Striving to catch it on the fluttering wind, Kevere tripped over Jinx's misplaced foot. He stumbled forward, his boot cracking through the rotten log, and he half-fell into honeycomb within. Kevere rolled on the ground, beating at the erupting swarm of bees and collecting bits of bark, leaves, and branches that stuck to the honey-mud covering him. Jinx fled to safety, but the black cloud of angry bees buzzed around Kevere. They chased the distracted kender toward the hobgoblin camp, stinging him wherever the mud was thinnest.

Screaming and trying to flee the swarm, Kevere ran right through the heart of the camp. The bees that followed caused great chaos — not that Kevere paid any attention, as he dashed to the swamp beyond.



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The hobgoblins, more than a little frightened by the elemental fury that brought a blight of bees, ran in terror for the safety of the marsh. The hidden kender let stones fly from slings, bruising any hobgoblin who failed to join the flight. Watching them, the kender laughed so hard, they couldn't catch their breath to pursue.

After a time, they descended to the camp to rummage. The kender found little to salvage, other than scraps of fur and blankets and food too rancid to even consider eating. But Myeki and Dare drew smoking branches from the campfire and chased the remaining bees from the log, so they could all sample the honey.

The terrorized hobgoblins, swatting angry bees all the way, finally reached what they believed to be the safety of the marsh. But when they approached the watery haven, out of the muck arose a fearsome creature snorting brackish water, flailing leafy

tendrils and terrible antlers. The creatures turned tail and fled into the hills, the dreadful monster close behind.

After a time, the monster stopped, though the frightened hobgoblins didn't look back. He shed his branch-antlers and leafy vines and wiped the weedy muck from his face, chuckling. Then Keveré realized he was completely lost. He snorted rancid mud from his nose and winced at the swelling stings. It could be worse, he thought. At least I'm still alive.

### To be concluded next month

*Harold Johnson is a creative director at TSR, Inc. He was responsible for the RAVENLOFT®, LANKHMAR™, and DRAGONLANCE® lines in 1995, and has added management of the DARK SUN® line to his responsibilities. Harold is the man who created kender.*



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## Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order.

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

**WARNING:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, *DRAGON® Magazine*, 201 Sheridan Springs Rd., Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be pasted an additional month before the deadline to the convention Calendar, *DRAGON Magazine*. TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3L6, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).



### Johncon '96

March 1-3

MD

Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, a comic book auction, dealers, and an art show and auction. Registration: \$30 preregistered, \$40 on site. Write to: John Hopkins University, JonCon, c/o Office of Student Activities, 122 Merryman Hall, 3400 Charles St, Baltimore, MD 21218.

### Miami Conjurer '96

March 2

OH

Clawson Hall Miami University, Oxford. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$3. Write to: Miami Conjurer, c/o Strategy Gaming Club, 356 Shriver Center, Oxford, OH 45056.

### Con of the North

March 8-10

MN

Landmark Center, St. Paul. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration \$15. Write to: Con of the North, P.O. Box 18096, Minneapolis, MN 55418

### Katsucon Two

March 8-10

VA

Holiday Inn Executive Center Virginia Beach. Katsucon is a convention devoted to Japanese

*anime and manga*. Special guests include Steve Bennett, John Ott, Bruce Lewis, Tim Eldred, Michael Ling, and Richard Kim. Registration: \$35 preregistered, \$40 on site. Write to: Katsu Productions, P.O. Box 11582, Blacksburg, VA 24060, or e-mail: katsucon@vtser.cc.vt.edu.

### CGC Game Auction

March 9

CT

Comfort Inn of Darien, Darien. Write to: CGC, P.O. Box 403, Fairfield, CT 06430.

### Marmalade Dog

Gamefest III

March 9-11

MI

Western Michigan University's John T. Bernhard Center, Kalamazoo. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$7/day, \$12/weekend. Write to: Western Michigan Gamers Guild, Faunce 2420 #47, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008.

### Ogre Con '96

March 9-10

OH

Oberlin College, Oberlin. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$5. Write to: Oberlin College Mailroom Box 9, Oberlin, OH 44074, or send e-mail to: gdouglas@occs.cs.oberlin.edu.

### Gamer's Con III

March 15-17

NJ

Sheraton Cherry Hill Hotel, Cherry Hill. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, tournaments, dealers, seminars, and an auction. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: Multigenre Inc. 266 Spruce Drive, Brick, NJ 08723, or e-mail: multigenre@aol.com.

### Princecon XXI

March 15-17

NJ

Princeton University, Princeton. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$20. Write to: PrinceCon Registration, 516 Witherspoon Hall, Rockefeller College, Princeton university, Princeton, NJ 08544, or send any e-mail to: krumholz@princeton.edu.

### Poly Con (AC1)

March 16



Cambridge Regional College, Cambridge, England. Events include role-playing, card and miniatures tournaments, and the first sanctioned DRAGON DICE™ tournament in the UK (with a special prize for the winner). Other activities include demonstrations and more. Write to: Michelle Moss, 10 Bernard's Close, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE18 7BQ, England.

- ❖ Australian convention
- \* Canadian convention
- \* European convention

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### Important:

*DRAGON® Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

**Nova 21****March 16-17 MI**

Oakland Center on the Oakland University Campus, Rochester. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, *anime*, and dealers. Registration: \$8 preregistered, \$10 on site. Write to: Order of Leibowitz, Oakland University, 49 Oakland Center, Rochester, MI 48309, or e-mail: jjputman@oakland.edu.

**Contamination****March 22-24 \***

Radisson Hotel, London, Ontario. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments and interactive gaming. Registration: \$14. Write to: Western Gaming Society, Room 340, UCC University of Western Ontario, London Ontario, Canada, N6A 3K7, or e-mail: gaming@mustang.uwo.ca.

**Coastcon XIX****March 22-24 MS**

Mississippi Gulf Coast Coliseum & Convention Center, Biloxi. Guests include Elizabeth Moon, Michael Stackpole, Tim Beach, and Tom Dupre. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, a costume contest, art show and auction, and a talent show. Registration: \$25 preregistered before 3/1/96, \$30 thereafter. Write to: Coastcon XIX, P.O. Box 1423, Biloxi, MS 39533, or e-mail: coastcon@aol.com.

**Coscon '96****March 22-24 PA**

Days Inn Conference Center, Butler. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and an auction. Registration: \$15 before 3/1/96, \$20 thereafter. Write to: Circle of Swords, P.O. Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003.

**MidSouthCon****March 22-24 TN**

Brownstone Hotel, Memphis. Guests include Barry Longyear,

Frank Kelly Freas, Glen Cook, and Larry Niven. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, an art show, and an auction. Registration: \$30. Write to: MidSouthCon, P.O. Box 11446, Memphis, TN 38111.

**Neovention XV****March 22-24 OH**

Gardner Student Center at the University of Akron, Akron. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$6/day. Write to: University Gaming Society, Gardner Student Center #6, University of Akron, Akron, OH 44325.

**Phoenix III****March 22-24 \***

Student Union building, University of New Brunswick. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and a miniatures painting contest. Registration: \$8. Write: UNB/STU Gaming Club, University of New Brunswick, P.O. Box 4400, Fredericton, New Brunswick, E3B 5A3, Canada, or e-mail: gameclub@unb.ca.

**Stellarcon 20****March 22-24 NC**

Holiday Inn Market Square, High Point. Guests include George Takei, Jim Crabtree, Steve Casper, and Steve Long. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include lectures, RPGA® Network events, an auction, and a beauty pageant. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: SF3, Box EUC UNCG, Greensboro, NC 27412, or e-mail: stellar20@aol.com.

**Technicon 13****March 22-24 VA**

Best Western Red Lion Inn, Blacksburg. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dance, an art show and auction, dealers, and films. Registration: \$20. Write to: Technicon 13, c/o VTSFFC, P.O. Box 256, Blacksburg, VA 24063.

**Egyptian Campaign '96****March 29-31 IL**

Southern Illinois University's Student Center, Carbondale. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and a painting contest. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 on site. Write to: Egyptian Campaign, c/o Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd. Floor Student Center, Carbondale, IL 62901.

**Norman Conquest VIII****March 29-31 OK**

Dale Hall on the University of Oklahoma Campus, Norman. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments. Registration: \$9. Write to: Norman Conquest VIII, 215-A OMU P.O. Box 304, 900 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019.

**Spring Offensive VI****March 29-31 IL**

Illinois Central College, Peoria. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Write to: The Game Room, 1293 Peoria St., Washington, IL 61571.

**Hawaii Hobbies Fair '96****March 30-31 HI**

Radford High School, Honolulu. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events, model building, and *anime*. Registration: \$5 on site. Write to: Eric Kline, P.O. Box 90182, Honolulu, HI 96835-0182.

**East Coast Hobby****Show '96****March 30-April 1 PE**

Fort Washington Expo Center, Philadelphia. Write to: East Coast Hobby Show, 4400 N. Federal Highway, Suite 210, Boca Raton, FL 33431.

**Conquest '96****April 5-8 ♦**

Melbourne University High School, Melbourne. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include demos and deal-

ers. Write to: Conquest, 40 Glenlyon Rd., Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia, or e-mail: puche@ariel.uce.unimelb.edu.au.

**Minicon M31****April 5-7 MN**

Radisson Hotel South, Bloomington. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a masquerade, and an art show. Write to: Minicon 31, P.O. Box 8297 Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408.

**Oeontacon****April 12-14 NY**

Morris Complex, SUNY College at Oneonta, Oneonta. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a masquerade ball and dinner. Registration: \$11/weekend, or \$5/day. Write to: Kelly Loucks, 47 East St., Apt. #2, Oneonta, NY 13820.

**Eucon 1****April 13-14 OR**

Holiday Inn, Eugene. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Registration: varies. Write to: Eucon 1, P.O. Box 11594, Eugene, OR 97440, or e-mail: eucongame@aol.com.

**Organized Kahn-Fusion XVIII****April 13-14 PA**

American Legion Post #751, Enola. Events include role-playing and card games. Other activities include a miniatures painting contest. Write: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 230 South 8th St., Lemoyne, PA 17043.

**Kettering Game****Convention XIV****April 19-20 OH**

Charles I. Lathrem, Sr., Center, Kettering. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and tournaments. Registration: \$3. Write to: Bob Von Gruenigen, 804 Willowdale Ave., Kettering, OH 45429.

**Pittsburgh Comicon****April 19-21 PA**

Expomart, Monroeville. Guests

include Stan Lee, Ed Beard Jr., and Timothy Bradstreet. Events include role-playing and card games. Registration: \$8/day, \$20/week-end. Write to: Comics World, 1002 Grahm Ave., Windber, PA 15963.

### Madison Games Con

**April 20-21 WI**

Downtown Arts and Activities Center, Madison. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction and a RPGA Network tournament. Registration: \$8. Write to: Pegasus Games, 341 State St., Madison, WI 53703.

### Please Name Our Con '96

**April 20-21 MI**

St. Clair County Community College, Port Huron. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and a raffle. Write to: PNOG, 204 Huron Ave., Port Huron, MI 48060.

### O-Con '96

**April 21-23 NY**

Morris Convention Center, Oneonta. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, demos, and contests. Registration: \$10 preregistered, \$12 on site. Write to: Buran Doyon, 5 Valleyview St., Oneonta NY, 13820, or e-mail: doyoir96@snyoneva.cc.oneonta.edu.

### Wizard's Challenge XIV

**April 26-28 \***

Travelodge Hotel, Regina, Saskatchewan. Guests include Skip Williams and Sam Chupp. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, films, and a banquet. Registration: \$20 Can. Write to: Ken McGovern, c/o Wizard's Challenge Society Inc., 2101 Broad St., Regina, SK, Canada S4P 1Y6.

### Dudley Bug Ball

**April 27 \***

Albright & Wilson Recreation Club, Station Road, Oldbury, West Midlands, England. Events include role-playing miniatures, and DRAGON DICE tournaments. Other activities include demonstrations,

dealers, and more. Write to: Steve Turner, 94 Laurel Road, Priory Estate, Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 3EZ, England.

### Conline XXI

**April 27-28 online**

Held on the GENie network in the TSR Online Roundtable. Featuring LIVING CITY™, LIVING JUNGLE™, and LIVING DEATH™ tournaments. E-mail: the.minstrel@genie.com.

### Noahcon '96

**April 27-28 OH**

Aqua Marine Resort, Avon Lake. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, demos, a miniatures painting contest, and an auction. Registration: \$3/day. Write to: Matrix Games & Diversions, 5384 East Lake Road, Sheffield Lake, OH 44054.

### Lehicon 6

**May 3-5 PA**

Day's Inn Conference Center, Allentown. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include demonstrations, dealers, art and miniatures contests, a food drive, and a blood drive. Registration: \$20 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: Lehicon 6, P.O. Box 556, Horsham, PA 19044.

### Mage Con North 2

**May 3-5 SD**

Sioux Falls. Guests include

Margaret Weis. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, and costume, art, and painting contests. Write to: Mage Con North, P.O. Box 84828, Sioux Falls, SD 57118-4828, or e-mail: Con@aol.com.

### At-Last-a-Con 2

**May 4-5 MO**

Knights of Columbus Hall, Ferguson. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a raffle and a painting contest. Registration: \$6 preregistered, \$10 on site. Write to: SAGA, P.O. Box 297, St. Ann, MO 63074.

### Roc of Ages

**May 10-12 NC**

Sheradon Airport Plaza, Charlotte. Guests include James Doohan, Doug Bradley, Gunnar Hansen, Barbara Leigh, and Allan Handelman. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, an auction, films, and an art show. Registration: \$15 preregistered, \$25 on site. Write to: GOTH, 105 Honeywood Ct., Kissimmee, FL 34743.

### Fantasy Fair 6

**May 12 \***

Cresset Exhibition Centre, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and films. Write to: Bruce King, 1

The Hallerds, Eaton Socon, St. Neots, Cambridgeshire, PE19 3QW, United Kingdom.

### Eclipse '96

**May 24-26 MO**

Holiday Inn Convention Center in Columbia. Guests include Tony DiTerlizzi, Zeb Cook, and Lester Smith. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, anime, and a murder mystery. Registration: \$18 preregistered, \$20 on site. Write to: Eclipse '96, 27 N. 10th St., Columbia, MO 65201.

### Gamex

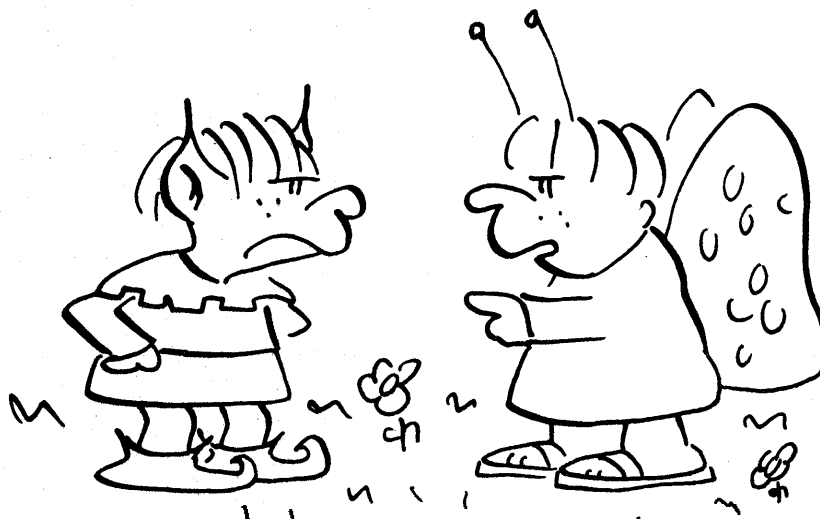
**May 24-27 CA**

LA Airport Wyndham Hotel, Los Angeles. Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a flea market, an auction, and dealers. Registration: \$25 preregistered, \$30 on site. Write to: Strategicon, 333 N. San Fernando Blvd., Burbank, CA 91502.

### Twin Con '96

**May 25-27 MN**

Events include role-playing, card, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA Network events, dealers, and demos. Write to: Jeff Hammerlund, 107 West Chicago St., Algonquin, IL 60102.



"My dad has more hit points than your dad!"

By Rex May



# Ye Olde GEN CON<sup>®</sup> GAME FAIR & FESTIVAL Countdown

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**1 day**

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*The 29th Annual*

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THE 29TH ANNUAL



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# ARCANE



Firework spells provide flash and dash

## And the Rockets' Red Glare

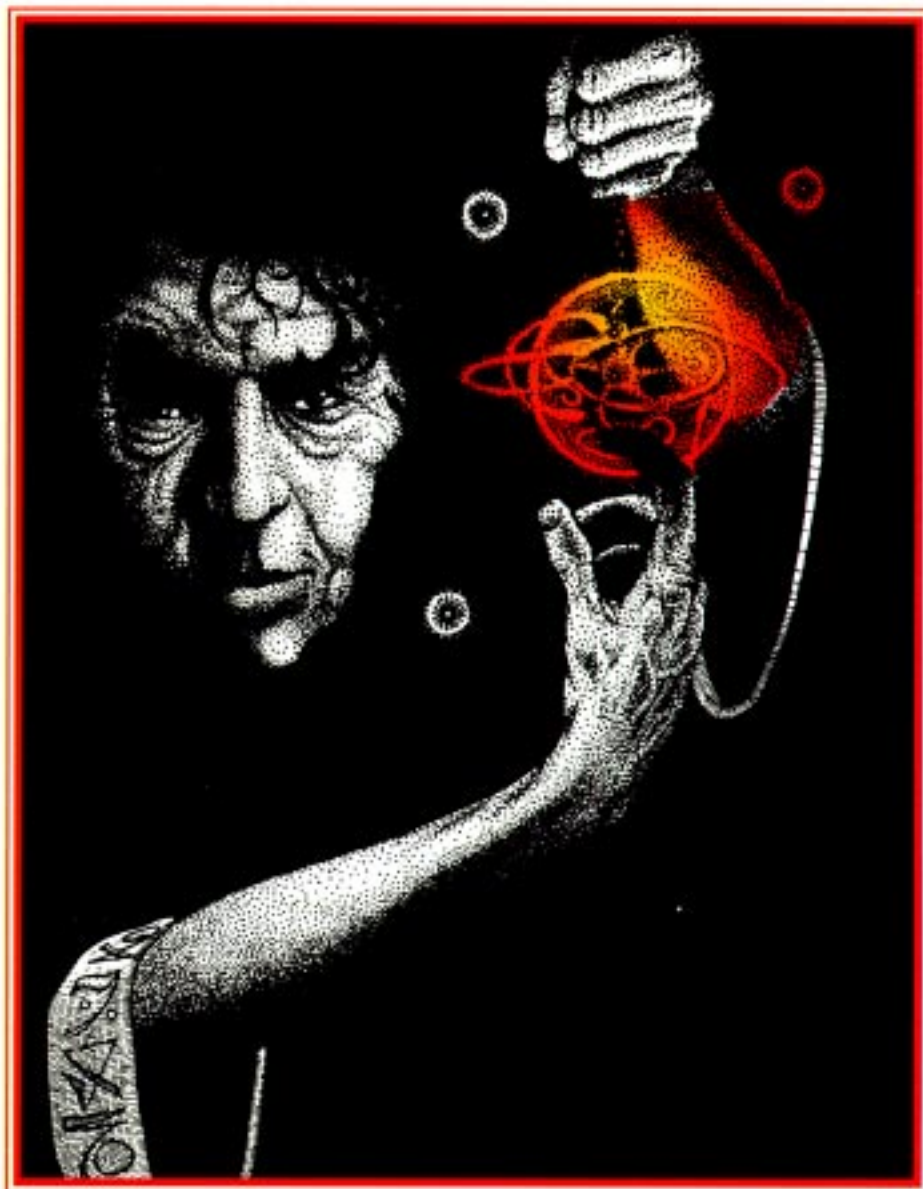
by Dale A. Hueber

illustrated by Jason R. Coleman  
& Larry Elmore

Fireworks, in some form or other, have been in use since the Chinese created them some 2,000 years ago. Depending upon the technology the Dungeon Master has set for his campaign, the use of fireworks may or may not be allowed. Fantasy fiction, however, is full of fireworks or similar magic.

With the advent of fantasy gaming, our concept of magic has grown. Stories now are rife with complicated and high-level magics, while stories from classical mythology involve simple spells concerned with manipulating lights, illusions, fire, and weather.

Fireworks and magic that imitates fireworks provide both DM and player with a challenging option to the traditional *fireballs* and *lightning bolts*. Pacifistic or war-weary mages can be of use in an adventure without having to slaughter everything in sight. A harmless *goblin chaser* or *dragon whirl* is quite useful in a hallway filled with orcs; the surprise and chaos created by the visual and auditory effects work well against the monsters' infravision and fears of magic.



Artwork by Jason R. Coleman

The higher-level spells can create an awesome display that would make any opponent think twice about tangling with the manipulator of such magic. Inventive players and DMs should be able to put a fireworks mage (a specialist) to quite good use.

Dungeon Masters can make the use of firework spells more interesting and challenging by specifying particulars regarding their casting. For instance, in my campaign, spellcasters can dictate the color of the spell effects when casting spells by manipulating their choice of material components; otherwise the colors are random. (Specifying colors in material components adds considerably to their manufacturing value.)

The fireworks spells noted below all draw their substance and energy from the quasi-elemental plane of Radiance. Creatures from the elemental plane of Fire suffer half damage from any physical effects. Creatures from the quasi-elemental plane of Radiance or the positive energy plane suffer no damage.

A subtle difference in the verbal component allows the mage to render all firework spells harmless. This difference is most often (90%) included in spell instructions; however, there is a 10% chance that the spell is set for either a harmful or non-harmful effect. If the spellcaster is unfamiliar with firework spells, he may not know the difference. This often has disastrous results.

While less effective in daylight, firework spells can still be used if the caster properly color-cues the components. The DM should adjudicate the visual effects — while not the damage — depending upon the light conditions.

## First level

### Firecracker

(Evocation)  
Range: 90 yards  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 round  
Casting time: 1  
Area of Effect: 10' radius  
Saving throw: None

With this spell, the wizard creates small, firecracker-type explosions within the area of effect. One "string" of 10 *firecrackers* is created per level of the caster. The strings appear 10 seconds after each other. The *firecrackers* appear in a 10' radius and inflict 1 hp damage per string

to all in the area. The *firecrackers* are loud and create quite a bit of acrid smoke that, unless dispersed by a strong wind, remains in the area for 1-3 rounds after the spell is finished. Any creatures in the area must successfully save vs. poison, or the smoke makes their eyes smart and water, giving them -1 on attack rolls. If the spell is used in a surprise situation, the party being surprised has a +4 penalty to the die roll.

The material component is several hairs from a black cat.

### Sparkler

(Evocation)  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 3 rounds/level  
Casting time: 1  
Area of effect: Special  
Saving throw: None

This spell creates a *sparkler* effect that can originate from any metal object. It creates an intensely bright light at the end of the object which throws off harmless sparks in a 2' radius. The *sparkler* does not harm the object upon which it is cast. The effect sheds light in a 10' radius similar to torchlight. If the *sparkler* is touched to exposed flesh (including the caster's), it inflicts 1 hp damage per level of the caster to a maximum of 10 hp. This causes the spell to end and the effect to go out. *Dispel magic*, *darkness*, and cold-generating magic does extinguish this spell, but ordinary water does not. This spell can light a torch or tinder in 3 rounds, but it cannot directly light oil. *Sparkler* works normally underwater.

The material component is a tiny strip of magnesium, which is not consumed in the casting.

## Second level

### Flare

(Evocation)  
Range: 180 feet + 30 feet/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 9 rounds + 2 rounds/level  
Casting time: 5  
Area of effect: Special  
Saving throw: Neg.

This spell creates a *flare* of light that shoots up into the air from a brass tube into which the caster has inserted a tiny strip of magnesium. The magnesium is

consumed in the spell; the tube is not. The ball of light is only 1" in diameter when shot but bursts with a 10' radius upon attaining the desired range. The ball slowly drifts to the ground at 20' per round. The *flare* continues to shed light in a spherical area whose diameter is equal to its maximum range throughout the spell duration regardless of its location. The brightness is equal in intensity to a *light* spell. Environmental light conditions affect the illuminatory effects of the *flare*, although the *flare* itself can be seen even in bright daylight. The *flare* is not hot and cannot set combustible objects on fire. It can be shot at any angle up, down, or across provided it can travel at least 90'. If the spell effect hits any object before traveling 90', it automatically fails.

The *flare* can be fired at a living target and, if used in this manner, acts as a *light* spell.

### Goblin Chaser

(Evocation)  
Range: 60 yards + 20 yards/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 segment/level  
Casting time: 2  
Area of effect: Special  
Saving throw: None

*Goblin chaser* sends a 3" diameter ball of light whistling along the ground in a direction indicated by the mage. The ball of light can travel either in a straight line ("shoot and forget") or any course ("actively directed") by the caster. The *goblin chaser* travels 100 yards per round. At the end of the spell's duration, on impact, or sooner if so designated by the caster, the ball explodes with a brilliant flash of light inflicting 1 hp damage per level of the caster to any creature within a 5' radius.

The ball must travel along a solid surface or it fails. As the ball travels, it emits a shrill, downward glissando whistle.

The material component is a silver-coated brass slide whistle worth at least 10 gp. The caster manipulates the whistle only for a brief moment, not for the entire casting time or duration of the spell. The whistle is not consumed in the casting.

### Spark fountain

(Evocation)  
Range: 60 yards + 1 yard/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 3 rounds + 3 rounds/level



Casting time: 2  
Area of effect: 20' radius  
Saving throw: None

With this spell, the caster creates a shower of brilliant, multi-colored sparks that shoot up in a fountain 8' high. The *fountain* illuminates an area with a 20' radius with the brightness of torchlight. Anyone in a 5' radius centered on the base of the *fountain* suffers 2 hp damage per round from the falling sparks. If the *fountain* is restricted in height, say through a low ceiling, the sparks fall outward 1' further for each 1' of height it is restricted. It can be created only on a solid, nonliving surface at least the consistency of mud.

The material component is a small, silver-coated brass cone worth at least 10 gp. The cone is not consumed in the casting.

## Third Level

### Bakarapper

(Evocation)  
Range: 120 yards + 20 yards/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 round  
Casting time: 3  
Area of effect: 20' radius  
Saving throw: None

This spell can be quite deadly if used against aerial creatures. With *bakarapper*, the caster creates a 1" ball of light that shoots into the sky much like a *flare*. Upon reaching the designated target point, however, the ball disappears. Six seconds later, the ball explodes into several balls of light (one per level of caster) that fly out in random directions from the center and then explode *inward* six seconds after that. The initial explosion causes no damage; the second explosion inflicts 2 hp damage per level of the caster to any creature within a 20' radius from the initial explosion.

When casting the spell, the spellcaster can add a thunderclap sound that increases the casting time to 4. The thunderclap deafens all in the area of effect causing them a penalty of 2 on die rolls. This spell must be cast so that the initial ball of light is fired at a minimum of a 45° angle from the horizontal plane. It can be triggered at any distance beyond 3".

The material component is a hollow 3" silver ball worth at least 200 gp. The tube is not consumed in the casting.

### Dragon Whirl

(Evocation)  
Range: 60 yards +10 yards/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 round/level  
Casting time: 3  
Area of effect: 5' radius  
Saving throw: Half damage

This spell creates a 1' diameter circle of whirling sparks at the caster's feet. The *whirl* sheds light in a 10' radius. It shoots out in an arc to a target point designated by the caster and explodes into a sphere with a 5' radius and inflicts 2d4 hp damage. A successful save vs. spell halves the damage.

It acts like *Melf's minute meteors* in that after the first *whirl* is created and sent out, subsequent *whirls* are created automatically each round thereafter. Each successive *whirl* is created and fired in the first few seconds of a melee round. The caster can fire the *whirl* and then cast another spell that round. The caster must designate a target each round or the spell stays in place, exploding at the end of the round. The spell can be discontinued by the caster before the duration expires naturally. The spell flies out at a range of 1" per second.

The material component is a silver likeness of a dragon worth at least 250 gp. It is not consumed in the spell casting.

### Roman Candle

(Evocation)  
Range: 120 yards  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 round + 1 round/level  
Casting time: 3  
Area of effect: Special  
Saving throw: None

The *Roman candle* spell fires small balls of light in a brightly colored array from a silver tube. The balls shoot out at a rate of fire determined by the caster, but they cannot be fired faster than one ball every 20 seconds nor slower than one per round. The caster can target each ball separately. The balls are shot as if missile weapons fired by a warrior of the same level as the caster (for example, *Roman candle* balls fired by a 10th-level mage have the THAC0 of a 10th-level warrior). Upon impact, each ball inflicts 1 hp damage for each level of the caster. If the ball misses, it travels to its range limit (unless it hits another object in the line of fire) and explodes, inflicting

1 hp damage on anyone within a 5' radius.

The mage must continue to direct the silver tube or (unless the spell is discontinued by the caster) the balls go off in the direction the tube is facing until the spell expires. If cast at a rate of one per round, the caster can place the tube in a safe place (on the ground, in a belt, etc.) and cast another spell, much as with *Melf's minute meteors*. It takes several seconds to place, and another few to recover the tube. At the one-per-round rate, the balls always shoot out in the first few seconds. The rate of fire cannot be changed once the spell is cast.

The material component is a 1" diameter tube of pure silver which is at least 6" long. It must be worth at least 150 gp in workmanship. It is not consumed in the spell casting.

## Fourth Level

### Special Effects

(Alteration)  
Range: 0  
Components: V, S  
Duration: 1 turn/level  
Casting time: 1 round  
Area of effect: Special  
Saving throw: None

With this spell, the caster can shape the physical characteristics of his firework spells. This spell also effects any spell that can be bound by a *display* spell. Thus a *wall of fog* can be formed into a mountain shape, or a *starburst* can burst into a phalanx of spears. The caster "shapes" his fireworks spells as he casts them, adding half a round to the casting time of each individual spell.

### Starburst

(Evocation)  
Range: 180 yards + 20 yards/level  
Components: V, S, M  
Duration: 1 round  
Casting time: 5  
Area of effect: Sphere up to 800 yards in diameter  
Saving throw: Half

Perhaps the most spectacular of the fireworks spells, *starburst* creates a huge aerial burst of colored sparks. Like *bakarapper*, it must be fired upward at least 45° angle from the horizontal. The initial effect is a 1' diameter ball of light

that explodes at a designated point and sends multicolored sparks outward in a brilliant display. Any creature caught in the area of effect suffers 2d4 hp damage, plus 1 hp damage per level of the caster. The initial ball of light must travel for at least 90' or it fails. The spellcaster can add a thunderclap sound at the casting of the spell, increasing the casting time to 6. The thunderclap causes deafness to all in the area of effect, inflicting on them a 2 point penalty on die rolls.

The material component is a platinum tube of fine workmanship worth no less than 500 gp.

## Seventh Level

### Display

(Evocation)

Range: 300 yards

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 turn/level

Casting time: Special

Area of effect: Special

Saving throw: None

This special spell binds several spells together into a single display or show. *Display* takes 1 round to cast for each spell that is bound. The caster must have

all spells to be *displayed* memorized or immediately available on a scroll. The caster actually casts the spells during the casting of the *display* spell. This spell has the following effects:

- The timing, direction, areas of effect, and color of all spells bound are dictated by the caster. Spells do not have to be cast within the *display* spell in the same order that the caster desires the outcome of the display to be.

- All spells can be designated as harmful or nonharmful. If nonharmful, then only the light or noise effects causes any one undue distress. The spellcaster must know and use the difference in the verbal component as the results are exactly as the spell is cast. This is of particular importance for spells cast off scrolls (which are set and cannot be changed by verbal components).

- The following spells can be bound by this spell: *affect normal fires*, *cantrip*, *light*, *dancing lights*, *phantasmal force*, *sparkler*, *firecracker*, *improved phantasmal force*, *flare*, *goblin chaser*, *pyrotechnics*, *dragon whirl*, *Roman candle*, *spark fountain*, *starburst*, *bakarapper*, *fire burst*, *continual light*, *darkness 15' radius*, *fog cloud*, *magic mouth*, *audible glamour*, *wall of fog*, *special effects*, and *sense shifting*. Spells that manipulate the characteristics of another spell (range, duration, etc.) can also be bound if cast within the *display* spell.

4) Bound spells activate according to the program designated by the caster regardless of their original spell duration.

The material component of this spell is a silver wand encrusted with gems, the whole of which is worth at least 1,500 gp. The wand is not consumed in the casting.



Dale A. Hueber is a U.S. Army major stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He has a wife, two children, one dog and a cat. He's been playing the AD&D® game for 16 years.

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Artwork by Larry Elmore



I am writing in response to Michael Fiorentino's letter in issue #221. I don't know just how long this "pro" has been playing, but I do know that, in regards to TSR's classic modules, not only does he miss the mark but also he is not even shooting at the right target.

I played the giants series all the way through back when they first came out, and I just finished DMing them last month. Both times, all I heard were rave reviews from everyone involved. If there was any lack of focus when Mr. Fiorentino played them, it was more likely due to the DM not properly integrating the modules into his world than to any problem with the modules themselves. I would love to see TSR re-release all the classic modules so that the younger players can experience facing Lolth on her own plane.

As a last note, in a hobby where more is definitely merrier, telling less experienced players to "take up a simpler hobby" is not the best way to go. I can't help but wonder whether Mr. Fiorentino leapt from the womb a master DM or, just maybe, he made a few mistakes and got a little help like the rest of us.

Larry Framness  
San Diego, CA

We must all realize that the majority of the non-gaming population sees us as juvenile male geeks playing a game with no redeeming social value. I can't tell you how many times I see people staring at me when I leaf through RPGs at the local gaming outlet, or the rolling eyes of some people when I tell them that I role-play. These sorts of experiences have been mentioned too many times by others to be ignored. What's to be done? How might RPGs better present themselves? They offer an exciting, social, imaginative activity in which ideas and fantasies are expressed in a loosely organized fashion. At what stage have these aspects of the game been lost on the public?

There are no easy answers. *Star Trek*, which suffered the same perception problems for a time, overcame them simply through overwhelming numbers. (Because 52% of the U.S. population can't be crazy.) Role-playing doesn't have those kind of numbers, however. Should we wait then for the public to accept us? I don't think so; inaction would be seen as an admission of the stereotype.

As far as the inclusion of women goes, I think a simple reaching out on the part of players and DMs would go a long way to solving the problem. Clearly something has to be done about fantasy art. (Don't get me wrong; I don't mind seeing the occasional scantily clad fighter-bimbette, but come on. Let's have a little reality in the portrayals.)

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***There should be less space devoted to the well-known thoughts of the "great gods of gaming" and more space devoted to the thoughts of the average player.***

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I'd like to see more print on how role-playing allows you to view issues from different angles. The games should make you think, and not enough people are aware of that. There should be less space devoted to the well-known thoughts of the "great gods of gaming" and more space devoted to the thoughts of the average player.

Peter Levi  
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Canada

This letter is written in defense of the so-called "dungeon-crawling" adventure modules. I have played the AD&D® game for nine years, and I must say that I quite disagree with what Koby Bryan wrote in issue #221 about the dwindling quality and rising cost of TSR products over the past few years. I must also comment on Michael Fiorentino's letter. Please do not consider this a personal attack, but I believe that you are missing the whole point. In the years since the classic adventures were made, role-playing has grown to such a degree that using a set of dice, a *Player's Handbook*, a *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide*, a *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome, and your imagination just won't do for some players. The creative imagery produced between the DM and the players is what makes this game so extraordinary. Unfortunately, adventures don't have to be designed that way. One of the most valuable game company tricks is to get

players so involved in the setting, NPCs, and storylines that they want to rush out and buy the modules, accessories, novels, and supplements to learn all they can about the campaign world. Thus, the campaign setting is important to the whole. And if you should find that a particular setting is not to your liking, then there is a plethora of others (with just as many supplements to buy) to reflect your style of play.

Over the years, I have encountered a steadily increasing number of people who seem to have no idea what the word "optional" means and who are incapable of not using every written rule. Many seem to be convinced that this "packaged imagination," as Koby Bryan puts it, must be used to get the "true AD&D experi-

ence." With the habitual use of ready-made campaigns and adventures, it quickly becomes evident why TSR dropped the "products of your imagination" slogan.

Of course, I realize that not all DMs have the time and energy to create a sophisticated campaign world or adventure. This is where modules come in. They merely serve to fill in the gaps.

Whatever happened to such great modules as *Expedition to the Barrier Peaks*? True, if played as presented, the module is no more than a dungeon-crawl. But by ignoring a measly three paragraphs under the background heading, one has an adventure that can be dropped into any campaign. This allows the DM to create his own background, competing factions, chain of events, etc. The module presents only a base concept, with ready-made maps, pregenerated monster encounters, and treasure that the DM can use or ignore as he sees fit. This grants the DM free reign over the incorporation of events into the group's own personalized campaign. This kind of module promotes true creativity, and those who prefer Marco Volo—style adventure are merely roll-players listening to a nice story. Perhaps they are the ones who need to take up checkers.

Tres DeLoach  
Yoakum, TX

It saddens me to hear of situations of poor DMing, such as the one in which Mr. Keefe (Forum, issue #224) found himself. As for solutions, I suggest the following:



Obviously, you could refuse outright and withdraw your character from the campaign, and you could possibly convince other unhappy players to do so as well. You could also try to form another group of players and begin a campaign of your own or find a new DM. But another option is negotiation. Ask the DM if the party of new PCs can go on a separate adventure to gain holdings and experience of their own. When they rise in strength, reintroduce the veterans accordingly. There may still be a chance of enjoying the game.

Nicholas Smith  
118 W. St. Louis Court  
Kokomo, IN 46902

In every campaign I have played over the past 15 years, the most powerful characters have been the thieves. This is because the rogue classes are, effectively, supercharged. On average, the rogues are two, three, or even four levels ahead of the pack throughout most campaigns.

Experience point requirements tend to be overlooked in the great favorite class debate. All the same, few players take barbarians or paladins because advancement is so slow. In a sense, XP costs are the most important strength or weakness of any class. Think about it. By the second or third adventure in most campaigns, the thief is already a level or two ahead. By this point he already has a better THACO than the clerics (check the tables), more hit points, excellent weapon choice ("any sword"; who uses anything else, given the choice?), and has the highest damage attack in the party (backstab). And because his prime requisite is Dexterity, the rogue even has a good natural armor class.

In other words, the thief is already the lynchpin of the party; the toughest, the most versatile. In a fight, he'll be in the thick of it with the fighters (after a stab in the back, perhaps); in the treasure room, he'll be creaming off a little extra before the party catches up — just doing his thieftly duty. And, as Nietzsche said, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. The thief's two-level basic advantage is quickly compounded. While the warriors and priest are chugging along like diesel trucks, the rogue can hardly help but make use of his greatest asset: supercharged level advancement.

The druid class is more excitingly, but more erratically, super-charged. At very low and very high levels, his advancement is painstakingly slow. But for great swathes of any long-term campaign, the

druid gains levels more rapidly than any other character. By 7th level (when he can shapechange into a cobra, a condor, and a leopard daily), the druid needs a third less experience than a regular cleric. And the druid reaches name level (12th) 140,000 XP ahead of the rogues, by which time the cleric has barely reached 9th level.

Now for a serious point. I can see why TSR is releasing so many new supplements. Any company has to maintain output to keep profits up. But in my opinion, it's not working; the new rules are just irrelevant, and they're alienating long-time players. I know, because I'm one of them. To put it another way, I play Rolemaster\* systems more often than the AD&D game now because the rules are simpler. Sad, but true. The strength of AD&D is its balanced simplicity; don't mess it up.

Tobias Hill  
London, England

I have a slight problem I hope you or your readers can help with. When playing, I would love to be able to send my dwarven character into battle singing a battle chant appropriate to the current enemy, but my poetic talents are not up to it. In a number of novels I have read, dwarven warriors sing battle chants, but the wording of the chants is almost always left out. I would love to see an article on this. Or readers can mail chants directly to me. Come on, dwarf lovers. Lets hear from you.

David Carithers  
998 Wayne Drive  
Snellville, GA 30278

I am writing in response to Geordie Keefe's letter in issue #224. As a DM, I too have been faced with the challenge of introducing new players to a long-running game. No solution is simple, and the judgment of the DM comes into play. Here is what I do.

Inexperienced players, especially a group of them, are easiest to handle. I just start a new game with them. All PCs begin at 1st level. This gives them experience in the game and full enjoyment of developing their characters. In my experience, trying to introduce these players to medium- to high-level games tends to scare off potential players. Better to take the time with them, teach them the ropes so as not to alienate them.

Handling experienced new players is a bit trickier. First, I familiarize them with the house rules, so they know what to

expect. If they have no PCs, I work with them to create characters. These PCs start two levels lower than the lowest-level PC of the same class currently in my game. No magical items or special powers are given. If the new players have PCs already, I first discuss the PC's goals and motives with the players, then I examine the characters, making any changes, including stripping items if appropriate. Since I do not disallow items capriciously or indiscriminantly, I give my rationale for any changes to the player. This usually gives them an immediate goal, for anything I disallow I explain as being "misplaced" on my world somewhere, during the PC's transition. This gives them a basic reason to play my game.

I developed this system through discussions with my players. They are satisfied with it and accept it, since they had a hand in setting it up.

A DM has a responsibility to provide an entertaining game for his players. He should provide an opportunity for all players to contribute to the game fairly. He should listen to the players and be flexible. He should provide an environment in which players feel welcome. A DM who does not do even these few things is abusing the one key element that makes the game work — the players themselves!

My advice is twofold: First, find a game in which the DM and players accept you as a gamer, not as a sideshow attraction. Be flexible yourself. There are many DMs out there, each with his own style. Work with the DM so that you and he are both satisfied with the style of play.

Remember: games are supposed to be fun, and role-playing is a game. If your DM ignores or refuses to recognize his treatment of new players, not only will he lose new players, but possibly he will lose his veteran players as well, and he will end up alone.

Anton J. Uselmann  
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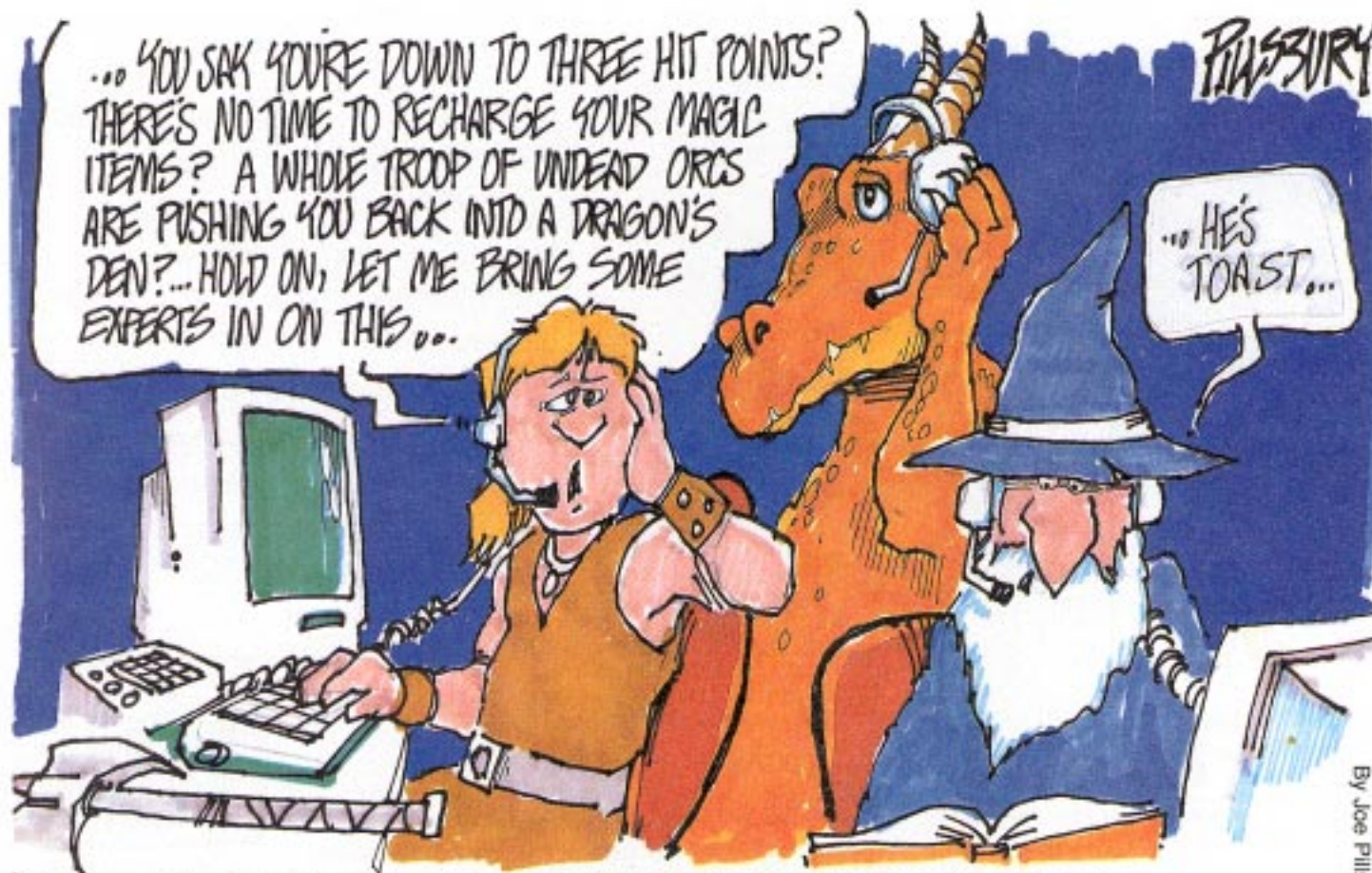


# DragonMirth



"Good shot, Igor... But next time, save the vat and just dump the hot oil."

By Frank Gunter



ANOTHER EVENING AT THE TSR CONSUMER HELP LINE...

By Joe Pilzbury





"Personally, I think you're hilarious, but then again, I don't get out much."



By Mat Guss

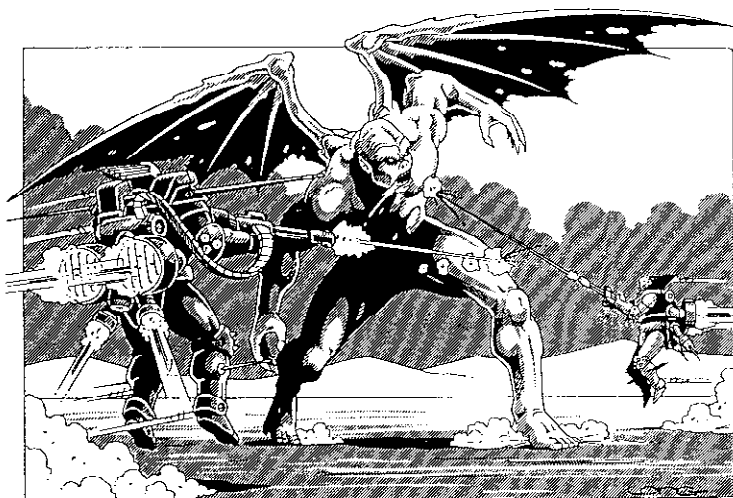


## FLINT AND STEEL

By Bill Hrenchuk



"As a matter of fact I was born in a barn... close the stupid door yourself!"



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- **The Rifts® Game Master Companion** comes as three 3.5" floppy disks and an instruction booklet. There are still a few minor bugs in the program, but nothing so bad as to prevent hours of enjoyment (update disks will be sent when they are available). Play testers loved it!
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# Knights of the Dinner Table™

By Jolly R. Blackburn  
Story suggested by Steve Lampman

LOOK, I'M TIRED OF TRYING TO DRAG YOU LOSERS INTO THE NEW ERA OF ROLE-PLAYING. SOONER OR LATER YOU'RE GONNA HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FACT THAT **DICE-BASED** SYSTEMS ARE OBSOLETE!

NO WAY. THE SOUNDS OF RATTLING DICE GO HAND-IN-HAND WITH ROLE-PLAYING. ARE YOU ON DRUGS OR SOMETHING??

DICELESS ROLE-PLAYING IS LIKE NON-ALCOHOLIC BEER, **B.A.** IF YOU'RE ASKING ME TO LEAVE MY DICEBAG AT HOME, THEN I'LL JUST SIT HOME WITH IT. IF YOU ASK ME, GAMES NEED **MORE** DICE, NOT LESS.

ANYTHING YOU WANT TO TRY IS FINE BY ME, **B.A.** I'LL TRY ANYTHING NEW.

YOU KNOW, **B.A.**, **HACKMASTER** IS SUPPOSED TO BE COMING OUT WITH A NEW DICE-BASED GAMING SYSTEM. MAYBE WE COULD TRY THAT, INSTEAD.



**A WEEK LATER...**

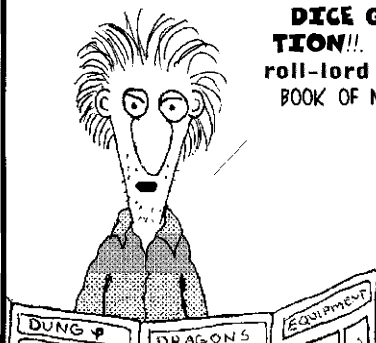
OKAY, WE SHOULD BE ALL SET TO TRY OUT **HACKMASTER'S** LATEST CONCEPT, **BUCKETS-OF-DICE GAME RESOLUTION!!!** I BOUGHT MY 500-DICE **roll-lord** SET, AND THE 200-PAGE BOOK OF NECESSARY TABLES AND CHARTS.

IT COST A BIT TO BUY THE MINIMUM AMOUNT OF DICE NEEDED, BUT WE SHOULD HAVE ENOUGH NOW. EVERYBODY ROLL 30 EIGHT-SIDED DICE TO DETERMINE INITIATIVE.

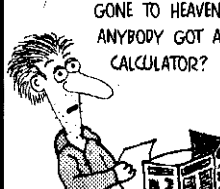
ROLL... ROLL... ROLL...

UMMM, HOLD ON... 3, 6, AND 8, THAT'S FORTY-TWO SO FAR...

HAH! YOU SHOULD HAVE PAID THE EXTRA FEE TO GET THE CHAOS-MAXIMUS SET, WITH LUMINESCENT NUMBERS. I'VE GOT A 213.



I'VE DIED AND GONE TO HEAVEN. ANYBODY GOT A CALCULATOR?



OK, BRIAN, YOU'LL START FIRST. ROLL EVERY TWENTY-SIDED YOU HAVE, AND DIVIDE THE TOTAL BY A D-30 ROLL.

A D-30?! BUT THAT DIE ISN'T INCLUDED IN THE BASIC SET!

YEAH, BUT NOW THEY'RE SELLING SPECIAL-EDITION SUPPLEMENT PACKS THAT INCLUDE 30-SIDERS. TOUGH

YOU CAN BORROW ONE OF MY 30'S, BRIAN.

NAW, THAT'D THROW OFF MY CUSTOM COLOR SCHEME. I'LL JUST PASS THIS TURN

ROLL... ROLL... ROLL...

LET'S SEE, THE **ROLL-LORD** DICE TABLES SHOW THAT YOUR SCORES NEED TO BE CROSS-INDEXED WITH A QUICK D-1000 ROLL... OKAY, THAT MAKES IT COLUMN TWENTY, ROW NINE. HMM...



**HOURS PASS...**

OKAY, THAT CHART INDICATES A CRITICAL DIE ROLL IS NEEDED, WHICH SHOULD BE THIS LIME-GREEN 12-SIDED ONE. CHECKING THAT AGAINST THE SUM OF ALL OF YOUR INITIATIVE ROLLS GETS A 14,982. HA! ROLL ALL YOUR SIXERS, FOLKS!

ROLL... ROLL... ROLL...

IF THIS DOESN'T TURN THEM TO DICELESS GAMING, NOTHING WILL...

I THINK I'M GOING TO NEED MORE DICE, MY COMPOSITE SCORES ARE TOO LOW.

LET'S SEE, OUT OF FIFTY 20'S ROLLED, I GOT TEN NATURAL 1'S, BEAT THAT, BRIAN!

DOES ANYBODY KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE GAME YET?

YEAH, IT'S ROUND TWO, AND I'M FEELING LUCKY. JUST FORTY D-4 ROLLS TO GO. TIME TO GET OUT MY THIRD BAG.





# SPACE HULK



## A BATTLE TO THE DEATH IN THE CHILLING DEPTHS OF SPACE

In the depths of space, vast derelict space craft drift ever closer towards Imperial Space. These space hulks harbor the terrible menace of the Genestealers - savage alien monstrosities, whose only purpose is to destroy. The fate of mankind lies in the hands of the Space Marines - the Galaxy's finest warriors. Clad in mighty Terminator armour, the Space Marines must obliterate the Genestealers or die in the attempt.

Space Hulk is coming in April, and will be available at all Games Workshop stores, Chapter Approved shops, and better hobby stores everywhere. To find out the retailer nearest you, give us a call at 1-800-394-GAME.



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**GAMES  
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# Down To Scale

## Paint like a pro!

by Daniel R. Williamson  
and J. Paul Bruton III

**H**ave you ever thought about painting a fantasy figure? Ever think, "If I could just get some simple instruction or find some advice, I'd paint these figures"?

The following is a nine-step, how-to article that can enhance your ability to paint figures. It's easier than you might think. We suggest you read through the entire article at least once before you try to paint your figure.

You will be able to use the techniques here to paint any figure you choose, but for the sake of this demonstration, we will walk you through the process of painting a dragon.

Dragons are powerful and majestic beasts, and we have chosen to demonstrate the techniques with a dragon

miniature because a well-painted dragon soars to life.

### What you need

To begin, you need several items.

**Paint brushes.** You need a #2, #1, #0, #3/0, and #10/0. (The largest is a #2, and the smallest a #10/0). When purchasing your brushes, make sure the tips are pointed. Natural bristles are better, and red sable the best type. You will also need an old cup or jar for water to wash off your brushes.

**Hobby knife.** Make sure you have a hobby knife with a number 11 blade (the long, triangular, pointed ones); they are the most versatile and most readily available blade type. You will need it for cutting flash or any imperfections away from the soft metal figure.

**Files.** You need one or two needle files (also called hobby files) for filing away the mold line.

**Paints.** Most people think enamels are used for painting miniatures, but enamels are too thick, and you would also have to deal with messy thinners. Acrylic paints are the choice of most miniatures painters; they are thinner than enamels, and they are water-based, so they wash out with water.

The following colors are needed to paint the dragon: Dark red, blood red, black, white, brown, leather, dark yellow, light yellow, black ink, gray, terra cotta, forest green, olive green, and pea green.

You may think that 15 colors is excessive. Just remember, we warned you up front that we want to teach you to paint your figures well. All of the above items can be purchased at any hardware, hobby or gaming store in your area and the initial investment will keep you stocked for a long time to come. If you don't want to purchase such a large variety of paints, you can buy the primary colors and mix them into the shades you need.

**Primer:** You will also need a can of gray primer. Flat white paint can be used too — just make sure you don't use gloss.

**Clear coat:** This is optional and is discussed under Step 9.

### Step 1. Preparation

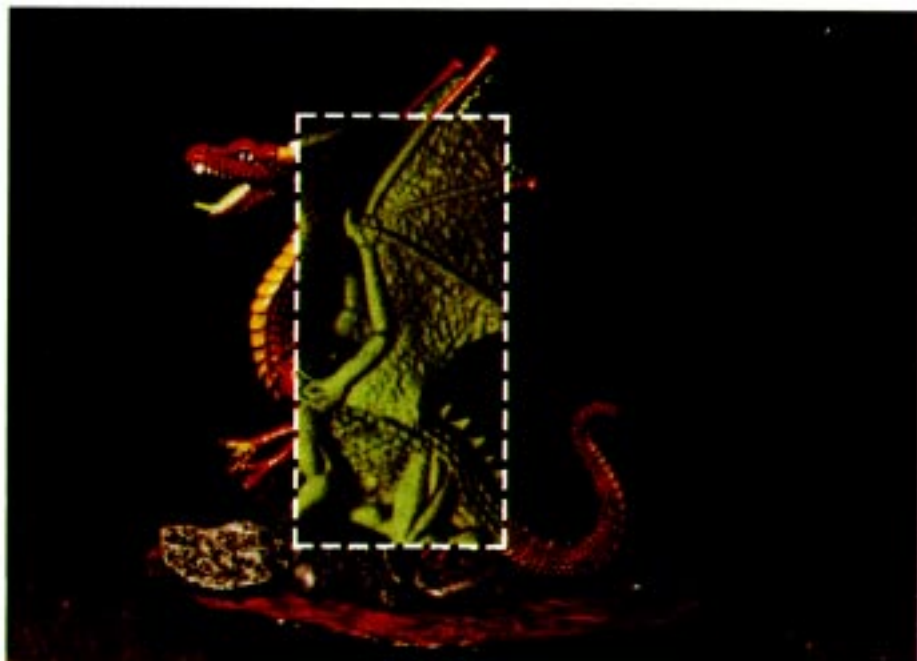
Just about all miniatures — whether they are pewter, lead, or even plastic — have mold lines. A mold line is where the figure's multi-part mold came together.

Use your file to shave any edges or burrs, but be careful not to file away too much detail. Most mold lines are faint and relatively easy to shave. The hobby knife is used to cut out any imperfections that the files cannot handle.

### Step 2. Assembly

Dragon models usually have several pieces that you must assemble before you can even start the actual painting. Follow the assembly directions that came with your figure. It is wise to make a dry run of the pieces to check if they fit properly before you glue them. If a piece does not fit right, use the file, or scrape with the knife, until it fits.

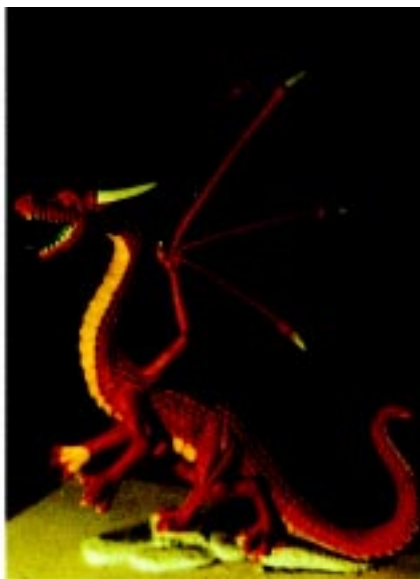
There are times when filing cannot prevent a gap between pieces. In this case, you have some options. You can use modeling putty or cyanoacrylate (Super Glue) to fill the gaps. The "glue in the gaps" trick is the fastest and easiest, but an occasional imperfect figure will require you to use putty.



When using putty, add small portions at a time to avoid building up lumps or bumps. Putty mistakes can be corrected with the file. If any detail is lost or covered by the putty, you can sculpt them back into the figure with your hobby knife.

### Step 3. Undercoat

The reason for undercoating or priming a figure is simple. The primer sticks to the surface of the miniature, allowing for a brighter base coat and an even application.



horns. They will be painted in Step 7.

If you accidentally paint a darker color in a space where a lighter color will eventually go, cover those dark areas with white paint. Once you have covered up any dark spots, paint the underbelly yellow.

Paint the dragon's wing membranes a flat black with the #10 brush. Use the #3/0 brush to paint the tongue green. Once you've knocked out the previous steps, take your #3/0 brush and paint the spines that go up the dragon's back black. Remember: the neater you paint the basecoat, the cleaner your final paint job will look.

### Step 5. Inking

Inking is an integral part of producing a finely detailed figure. Spread the ink across your figure with a #2 paint brush. When the ink-loaded bristles come into contact with the figure, the ink seeps into all of the figures' little nooks and cran-

nies. If you've never tried it before, this can be a rather messy step.

Be very careful, a little ink goes a long way.

Inking is the quickest step because you are simply coating the whole model in black ink. On the other hand, it takes the longest to dry. If you finish inking your figure and discover a few missed spots, ink those areas again. There will be no noticeable difference in appearance when your figure is dry.

If you try to start painting while the ink is still wet, the ink will absorb into your brush and muddy the color that you are working with. Make sure the ink is completely dry before you start on the next step. If you want to, you can use a blow-dryer to expedite the drying process.

### Step 6. Drybrushing

This is a two-part step. Drybrushing is applying small amounts of pigment to a figure using a brush that is virtually dry. To drybrush, dip the tip of your paintbrush into the paint, then take a napkin or cloth and wipe the paint off of the bristles. The bristles should look as if they have nothing on them; however, when you run the brush lightly across your thumbnail a few times, there should be a few light streaks of paint.

When it comes to drybrushing your model for the first time, start on an area that isn't too noticeable until you get a feel of what drybrushing does. In essence, drybrushing causes the little bit of paint left in the bristles to come in contact with the upraised areas of the model. What inking does for shadow, drybrushing does for highlights. It accents all the minute detail and gives your figure depth. Drybrushing also



Apply the primer coat in a well-ventilated area. It is difficult to paint while you are passing out. Hold the can of primer approximately seven to eight inches away from the model and spray in short bursts from side to side. Make sure the figure is dry before handling it again.

### Step 4. Basecoat

Look over your figure and decide which colors to use. In this case, we are going to use the #2 brush with dark red paint on the scales and a #1 brush with yellow for the dragon's underbelly. The dragon also has a mane which will be painted brown using the #0 brush.

When applying the basecoat, paint the largest single color area on your figure first. In this case, paint the dragon's body first. Don't paint the really small areas such as the eyes, teeth, claws and





makes your figure appear more realistic.

Start by drybrushing the entire dragon with white. (It won't look too appealing, but you will begin to see a shading effect.) Don't put a so much white on the model that you cover up the shading. The reason for drybrushing with white is because the black ink covers up the brightness of your basecoat, the white covers the areas on the figure that will be again painted bright. Since red cannot cover up black, you need the white coat. Use this same technique on the yellow belly scales.



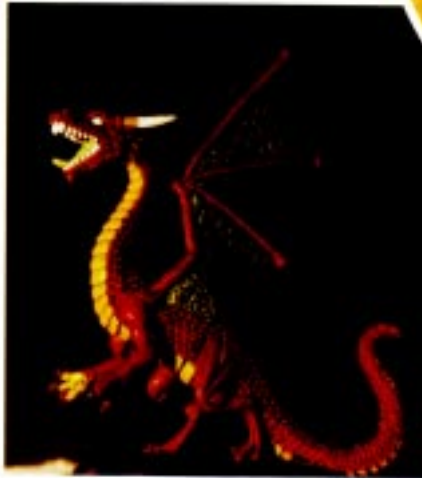
Now begin the second drybrushing step, in which colors are re-applied. Start with the largest area that will be red. Dip your paintbrush into the red paint, wipe the paint off, and begin gently brushing against the flow of detail. Make sure that you can't see any white. If you can, go back over that spot. You will really notice the paint job starting to come together during this step.

Drybrushing does take a toll on your brushes. After you have drybrushed, you may notice how the bristles have frayed. Frequently using a paint brush for drybrushing causes bristles to lose their point. You may want to designate a couple of your older brushes (one small and one large) as drybrushes.

Places where two different colors come together (for instance, the dragon's

body scales and the belly scales) should be left alone until the next step, highlighting.

The skin between the wings should be drybrushed with an olive green. Leave the basecoat of black in all of the divots and cracks and try to drybrush only the upraised areas. The deep red, green, and black combination helps to give your dragon a more reptilian look. The tongue should be drybrushed with forest green. Be careful not to get paint on the teeth, because that will only mean more work when it comes to doing the teeth in highlighting. The mane should be drybrushed with drab brown. The figure should start to look like it is almost done.



## Step 7. Highlighting/outlining

Highlighting is adding the finishing touches to your figure. You will need a little practice to get the hang of highlighting. Paint all of the details — such as the eyes, teeth, and claws — so they stand out on the figure. When doing minute detail work, your hand might shake. To remedy this, brace your painting hand against your work area or use your other hand to hold it still.

Begin by painting the claws and giving the spine a second coat of black. Be careful not to get any black paint on the lighter colors. Then paint the two horns on the dragon's head white.

Use a #3/0 paintbrush to drybrush a second coat of the tongue with olive green. The olive green will help to highlight the previous coat. Again, be careful not to hit the teeth.

Now lightly drybrush all the claws and spines with gray. This adds dimension and an appearance of light reflecting.

Before proceeding to the eyes and teeth, stop painting for a few minutes and take a break. You have been looking at the model for so long that it is possible to overlook any mistakes you may have made. After about five minutes,

come back and look over the figure. Any spots that you missed or over-painted will be much easier to notice now. Correct them before continuing.

The eye is the most crucial part of painting figures, and it takes practice to get it right on the first try. A dragon's eyes look more like a cat's eyes than a human's.

Paint the eyeball white. You should be using a #10/0 brush, the smallest. Once the white has dried, use the black paint for the pupil (remember the shape!). Dip the brush (#10/0) and draw a short line on some scrap paper to get rid of the excess paint that collected on the end of your bristles. Steady yourself and paint one streak of black, keeping it as thin as possible. Do this a few times to get the pupil slightly wider. Before doing this, look at the dragon from a front view. Make sure the eyes are staring at you evenly. While you still have black paint on your brush, dab the tip into the nostrils to give them an appearance of depth. Paying attention to such minor detail adds realism to your figure.

The teeth, eyes, and face are major focal points to any miniature. When looking at a figure, most people's eyes are drawn first to the face. Without a realistic looking face, a miniature will not turn out "right."

The teeth are drybrushed white with a #10/0 brush. This does not complete the teeth, it just covers a large amount of area to save you time. Using the same #10/0 brush, touch up each individual tooth with white. Try not to go over the black shading that separates the teeth from the tongue. If you do, you will obscure the shadowing between the two areas.

Now you should touch up the areas where two colors come together. Take the #10/0 brush and carefully paint the sides of the red scales that touch the yellow



low underbelly. It is relatively easy to paint these, since the scales stick out. Just run your brush along their sides, being careful not to get any red on the yellow underbelly.

To finish the horns, take the color leather (or mix a light brown) on the #10/0 brush and start at the base of the horns. Brush upward just about 1/16 or 1/4 of an inch. Paint the base of the horns slightly jagged to give the realistic appearance that most fantasy dragons horns have.

Outlining takes a lot of practice to master, but it will make the fine details of your paint jobs stand out all the more once you get the hang of it. Use this technique once you are familiar with all the others steps. Not all figures require outlining; it just distinctly separates where two colors meet and makes them stand out more.

Using the same technique you used for the pupils, paint a straight black line that separates some minor detail that ink doesn't totally cover. Depending on how much ink was used around the areas in question, that alone may do the job.

Until then, let the ink do the job of outlining. Note, black is not the only color used in outlining. For different colors and effects you can use any number of colors. Just make sure the outline does not clash significantly with the opposing color. When first learning to outline, some lines will turn out jagged or a little blob of paint will show up where its not wanted. The best way to outline anything is to touch the area very lightly and set the loaded bristles into the groove that is to be outlined. Then, in one gentle pull of the brush until you have reached the end of the line. If you happen to stop, the line will end up jagged. If you didn't wipe some of the paint from the bristles, you will have a glop of paint where you don't want it.

Some areas on this figure that will be outlined are: around the eyes, the base of the horns, and the areas where the wing membranes meet the red fingerlike extensions.

When beginning to do this, don't forget to pull off the excess paint on a scrap piece of paper. Start by working on the wing areas on the back of the figure. The wings are the easiest because they are

only a straight line and have rather large grooves in which to set your brush.

Next, paint the base of the horns. Follow the directions above, keeping the lines relatively thin. This keeps the outline subliminal. You don't want them to stand out.

The eyes are next. Outlining really helps out by throwing an added shadow around the eyes, especially on a dragon. It is also the hardest because eyes are an oval shape and a lot smaller than most areas to be outlined. This is where you have to be the most careful. One wrong pull, and that eye could be ruined and have to be redone. Don't even attempt to outline the eyes until you have become rather competent with outlining in general.

Once you have finished outlining, Look over the dragon and see if there are any spots that you have missed. It is good to get into the habit of stopping and looking over your model after every step so you don't have to go back to fix an area. This ruins your train of thought.



## Step 8. The base

Most beginning painters disregard bases and just paint them black or some other neutral color.

Which would you rather see, a fearsome dragon standing on a black pedestal or a fearsome dragon standing on a rocky outcropping? Our guess is the latter. A base adds to a figure more than detracts from it.

Most figures come with bases that are either cast as part of the figure itself or cast separately. You don't have to use the base that comes with model either. If your figure has a very small base (like our example), it means you run the risk

of your nicely painted miniature being knocked over all the time.

We decided to modify the base to make the figure more stable. The dragon's base pictured here was made from foam card and reinforced with three pieces of posterboard for added support. You can use any number of materials for a base, including wood or plastic.

Since the base of the dragon is part of the figure, we glued the model to the foam card. Let the glue bond completely before handling it again.

The molded base is made completely of rocks. This means we need other rocks on the base so it won't look like those are the only rocks in the area. Go outside and scan the ground, especially the driveway. Grab several small rocks or pebbles. Take them inside and wash them to get the dirt and mud off. Once they are dry, place them around the base in different formations until you like the way they look.

Once you have chosen the rocks, paint the rocks and base black. After they are dry, drybrush them gray. When drybrushing around the dragon's feet, take care not to get any gray on them.

On the base pictured we used wall spackling to give the ground an uneven look. When the base is dry (which will take some time since it is a plaster-like compound), give it a basecoat of brown, let it dry. Using terra cotta, drybrush the base to accent the bumps and ridges. Then, highlight the terra cotta with drab brown.

Glue the rocks to the base and let it all dry.

Grass gives a realistic look. You can purchase "flocking" or shredded velvet at any number of craft and hobby stores relatively. You can opt to cover the entire base, some or none at all. Once you have decided, use Super Glue in a small part of the area that you want to be covered. You will have to do this in small patches, as all cyanoacrylates dry within seconds, so by the time you covered the entire area, it would be dry. Sprinkle more than enough flocking over the glue, wait a few minutes for it to dry, then shake the excess off. Repeat until you are finished with the grassy areas. (You can even run glue between and on the sides of rocks to give a mossy appearance.)

For more organic elements, you could use a small painted twig to appear as a



fallen tree or log. A few bristles from a straw broom cut to an appropriate length and glued into the "ground" will produce reeds.

You can continue the terrain around the edge of the base if you wish, you can paint the edge black, or some other color.

### Step 9. Clearcoating

This step is optional, but useful if you will be gaming with the miniature or your miniature will be handled a lot. If you plan on putting it on display you may skip this step.

Clearcoating is very simple. Hold a can of clear coat six to eight inches away from the figure and give the dragon three light coats. Be careful not to put too much on in one coat, as it causes the clear coat to run or dry muddy-looking. Make sure each coat is dry before handling or applying a subsequent coat.

When clearcoating, make sure you are spraying in a well ventilated space, and follow the directions on the back of the can.

Now you can call your friends over to admire your handiwork, and to start that



game. Remember, it may take some time to get your paint job to the level as the one pictured here, but the more you practice, the better you will get.



*The authors are both in the U.S. military, and are stationed at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. They have quite a collection of painted miniatures. This is their first appearance in the pages of DRAGON® Magazine.*

An advertisement for Outland Fantasy Games. The background is a black and white image of an astronaut in a space suit floating in space, with a large planet and a ringed planet visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

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# Role-Playing

## Reviews

Scary stuff

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When it comes to horror, I like mine blood-red and gooey. None of this namby-pamby junk, like creaking doors and shadows on the walls. I want to see heads exploding and eyeballs popping. I want to rob graves and cha-cha with the corpses. And I expect my horror games to deliver the goods—if I don't make at least one of my players sick, I consider the session a failure. But that's just me. Whether you prefer subtleties or stomach-churners, you'll find some choice recipes below.

### The Nightmare Lands

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game supplement for the RAVENLOFT® setting

Two 64-page books, one 32-page book, one 16-page book, two 21" x 32" map sheets, boxed

TSR, Inc. \$20

Design: Shane Lacy Hensley and Bill Slavicsek

Editing: Bill Slavicsek

Illustrations: John Snyder

Cover: Den Beauvais

Z-z-z-z. . . Z-z-z-z. . . huh? Oh, sorry. I was perusing the latest batch of collectible card games, and I must've dozed off. Anyway, while I was asleep, I had this great dream. I dreamed that TSR realized that after 10 years and a coffin-full of supplements, the RAVENLOFT setting was getting a little stale. So guess what they did? They put on their swami robes, then communed with the sources that inspired H.P. Lovecraft's "Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath" (1926), which in turn inspired Chaosium's *Dreamlands* (1986), arguably the best-ever expansion set for the Call of Cthulhu\* game.

Then I woke up and... hey, what do you know!

Like *Dreamlands*, *Nightmare Lands* envisions the realm of dreams to be an actual place, replete with physical landmarks, flesh-and-blood inhabitants, and a multitude of grisly ways to meet your maker. It's not an original idea, but it's still a good one. *Nightmare Lands*, despite its shortcomings, rivals *Masque of the Red Death* (reviewed in *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #216) as the most provocative RAVENLOFT variant to date.

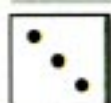

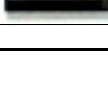

Designers Shane Lacy Hensley and Bill Slavicsek have a knack for queasy detail. Describing a portrait-painting monk, they write: "I watched in horror as the brush, which [the monk] had not touched to the palette again, continued to ooze red paint onto the canvas.... [He] stood and wiped his stained hands on his tattered robe. A black splotch on the robe moved, and a dozen black spiders scurried into the folds." The books abound with equally memorable passages; even the rules read like good fiction. The graphics, alas, are another story, strictly PG-rated and nowhere near as evocative as the text. The poster maps, which identify only a handful of areas, look like rush jobs.

But back to the good stuff.

Book One, a memoir of the director of the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed, acquaints us with the setting, a dreary stretch of badlands on the cusp of the Demiplane of Dread. It also introduces the realm's administrators, the Nightmare Court, a squad of omnipotent fiends who can "make the sun shine green."

Book Two, the rules summary, opens with a discussion of the nature of dreams. Dreams, according to Hensley and Slavicsek, exist on four levels of reality. The vast majority of dreams — those experienced by you and me — exist on Level One; they're fleeting, insubstantial, and of no consequence. Level Two dreams occupy tangible pocket dimensions called dreamscapes; those of advanced aptitude — in other words, the player characters — can enter these dreamscapes and interact with the inhabitants. Level Three dreams aren't dreams in the accepted sense; rather, they represent the reality of the standard AD&D® campaign worlds. Level Four dreams represent hyper-reality, where experience and perception become "more real than reality itself." I didn't understand it, either — what exactly is more real than reality? — but after scruti-

### Role-playing games' rating

	Not recommended	
	May be useful	
	Fair	
	Good	
	Excellent	
	The BEST!	

nizing the description a few times, it began to make sense... sort of.

Anyway, to get to Level Two, you'll need a dream-self, which functions as a player character's spiritual alter ego — in essence, it's a PC's PC. A character's dream-self has the same Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores as his normal self. His Strength, however, is equal to his Wisdom, and his Dexterity is the same as his Intelligence; thus, brain becomes brawn, a first for AD&D. While warriors suffer an obvious disadvantage, any intellectually-inclined characters benefit; bards and illusionists, owing to their creativity, receive bonuses to their dreamscape die-rolls. Psionics, who have high scores in both mental attributes, benefit most of all; not only do they become significantly stronger, their psionic abilities, like *ego whip* and *mind thrust*, become formidable weapons. (If you've never whipped your ego, the *Complete Psionics Handbook* will show you how).

It's the dream terrain itself, however, that has the most dramatic effect on the characters, and here's where the real fun begins. The terrain of a Level Two dream — that is, the general tone and ambiance of the dreamscape — derives from a significant Level Three event. For instance, after a PC completes a difficult quest in the waking-world, he might experience an uplifting dream when he falls asleep; while wandering around an uplifting dreamscape, a dream-self's die-rolls improve by as much as +4. Conversely, a nightmare dreamscape — triggered by a death in the family, lingering illness, or similar trauma — imposes a -4 penalty on all friendly die-rolls. Further, characters accumulate Inner Strength (IS) points after experiencing uplifting dreams. IS points benefit different dream-selves in different ways; rogues expend IS points to boost their Dexterity, wizards use IS points to enhance their spells. By overcoming obstacles in dreamscapes, dream-selves acquire Mental Fortitude points, which can be used to thwart the minions of the Nightmare Court.

Dreamscape combat inflicts a variety of penalties. A battle gone awry can result in an Intelligence loss for the dream-self, a coma for the normal self, or death for both selves. A PC who fails a madness check, required when his dream-self witnesses a terrifying scene or has his hit points reduced to 0, may be saddled with a mental illness, such as Paranoia or Severe Depression. (Incidentally, the designers mistakenly identified

Multiple Personality Disorder as Schizophrenia; I — ahem — married a therapist, so I know these things.)

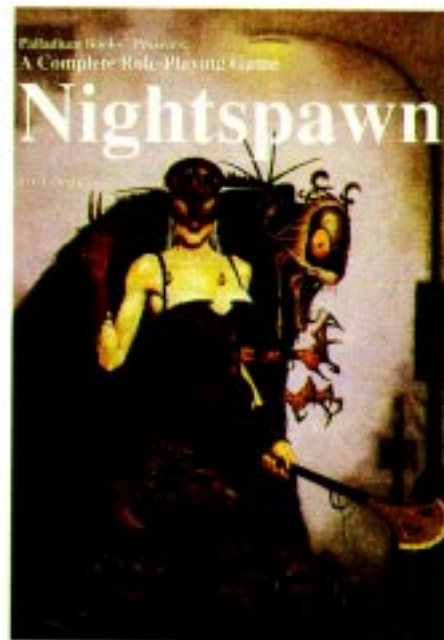
Put it all together, and you've got one mind-bender of a campaign, with the players juggling two sets of character sheets (one set for the PCs, one for the dream-selves) while the PCs whip back and forth between realities. Dream-selves can visit such intriguing locales as the Forest of Everchange, a wilderness of random weather, and the City of Nod, a mad metropolis where the buildings move of their own volition. The 16-page *Monstrous Supplement* describes the Nightmare Court in all their gruesome glory; the Ghost Dancer resembles an alabaster ballerina wearing a blood-splattered gown, Morpheus is a red-skinned imp who can *shapechange* into a dragon. The *Book of Nightmares* presents four fully-developed dreamscape adventures, only two of which I could play (a printing error screwed up the middle section of my review copy). But those two were pretty good, especially "The Rose of Midnight," featuring a visit to the City of Nod and an ambush by a swarm of flying heads.

Even with four books, however, *Nightmare Lands* feels a bit thin. The locations aren't developed enough; the City of Nod entry barely fills a half-page. Role-playing notes are similarly sparse; my players wondered if their dream-selves could get sick, reproduce, or even travel to other planes of existence. The text provides few concrete answers. I wanted more staging advice; exactly what do dreamscapes look like (compared, say, to the various realms in the PLANESCAPE™ setting), and how do I invent my own?

**Evaluation:** *Nightmare Lands*, with its abstract concepts and sophisticated rules, is unsuitable for novices. The designers suggest the materials can be used "to run dream adventures in any campaign," but that's wishful thinking; references to fear checks and the Demi-plane of Dread make familiarity with RAVENLOFT a must.

With its dreamwalking characters and hallucinatory imagery, *Nightmare Lands* owes a heavy debt to Mr. Lovecraft; even the chapter heads echo Lovecraft story titles (*Nightmare Lands*: "Beyond the Halls of Madness;" Lovecraft: "Beyond the Walls of Sleep"). But this isn't just TSR's version of *Dreamlands*; it's a new way to experience AD&D. *Nightmare Lands* turns run-of-the-mill PCs into metaphysical spooks, then thrusts them

into a surrealistic theme park. Veteran RAVENLOFT players should find that close to a dream come true.



### Nightspawn\* game

240-page softcover book

Palladium Books \$2

*Design:* Carlos J. Martijena-Carella with Kevin Siembieda

*Editing:* Kevin Siembieda with Alex Marciniszyn, James A. Osten, Kevin Kirsten, and Julius Rosenstein

*Illustrations:* Vince Martin, Randy Post, Scott Johnson, and Roger Peterson

*Cover:* Brom

Before hitting the jackpot with the Rifts\* game, Palladium Books spent the better part of a decade cranking out odd-ball gems like the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles\* game, based on the still-cool comic book, and the Beyond the Supernatural\* game, a neat blend of horror and science-fiction. *Nightspawn* mines the same territory as Beyond, sharing its twisted mix of parapsychology, international intrigue, and B-movie monsters. But *Nightspawn* — a self-contained RPG for newcomers to the Palladium universe — takes the Beyond fundamentals to outrageous extremes. The game casts players as shapechanging monstrosities, arms them with spells and submachine guns, then sends them off to do battle for the soul of the cosmos. It should've been a mess, but it's only a near-mess, a sprawling, absurdly ambitious RPG that makes Beyond the Supernatural look like tic-tac-toe.

First, you'll have to hack your way



through a tangle of dense rules. Character creation, derived from the Paladium Role-Playing Game\*, requires players to roll up eight basic attributes, then stuff them into a menu of numbing formulas. Sample: "Normal and extremely strong characters can hurl a weight equal to the weight he can carry four inches per each P.S. [Physical Strength] point. This means the person with P.S. 9 can toss 90 lbs. (40.5 kg) up to 2 ½ feet (0.6 to 0.75 m). . . ." Combat is a series of math problems, based on Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.) and a host of modifiers. Sample: "Characters with Artificial Body Armor . . . can easily be successfully attacked by rolls falling under the artificial armor's A.R. [Armor Rating]; doing damage to the S.D.C. of the body armor . . . Or, by striking above the armor's A.R., damaging the character's personal S.D.C. and/or hit points, but not the body armor S.D.C." Are the mechanics well-explained? For the most part, yes. Are they a pain in the neck? For the most part, yes.

But out of the stodgy game system crawl some awesome characters. Nightspawn, the stars of the show, have two forms: a human form, called the Facade, and a monster form, called the Morphus. In most cases, a Facade can shapeshift to his Morphus in a single 15-second round, though in a pinch (and with a successful Mental Endurance roll), he can reduce the time to three seconds. Each Morphus is unique, his appearance determined by player choice and random rolls on a series of Characteristic Tables. A typical Morphus combines features of animals, aliens, even machines, with deliciously bizarre results. I came up with a bat-winged humanoid toad whose skin was covered with razor blades; my wife invented a half-woman/half-cow with six eyes, crystalline spine projections, and a set of functional jet engines growing out of her back. You can add everyday skills, such as Gymnastics and Computer Operation, or experiment with supernatural talents, like Lightning Rider (the character becomes pure electrical energy) and Bloodbath (he suffocates victims with streams of his own blood). A complicated but lucid magic system, adapted from *Beyond the Supernatural\**, allows characters to tinker with more than 130 spells, among them super-human speed and enslave entity. Psychic abilities, available to those with enough Psychic Energy points, include levitation, telepathy, and deaden pain. And what your characters lack in natural gifts, they can make up in hardware; weapon

options range from ninja blades and boomerangs to rocket launchers and laser rifles. The resulting PCs are breathtaking creations of staggering power. Compared to **Nightspawn's** indomitable brutes, warriors and wizards in the AD&D game seem as dangerous as Girl Scouts.

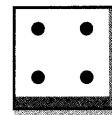
The game takes place on 21st Century Earth, a filthier and more corrupt version of the world we live in now. Much of the misery stems from the reign of the Preserver Party, a group of pinhead conservatives who came to power in the United States on a promise of "ten thousand executions a year." Unknown to most, the Preservers are lackeys for the Nightlords, heartless abominations from another dimension who aspire to exterminate mankind. Opposing the Lords are the Nightspawn, who've organized themselves into underground factions called the Resistance, the Lightbringers, and the Spook Squad. Somewhere in the middle lurk the vampires, a network of chronically famished bloodsuckers who see the Nightspawn, Nightlords, and regular humans as parts of the same buffet. It's a promising set-up, but aside from a few skimpy outlines, the book doesn't provide much in the way of adventures. If all else fails, you can always turn the PCs loose and let them pulverize each other.

**Evaluation:** Maybe I'm nuts, I don't think **Nightspawn** is about monsters at all — I think it's about adolescence. Consider this excerpt from the introduction: "For most, [the change] occurs in the years spanning the time when you are no longer a child, yet not fully an adult." That sounds like puberty to me. Or this: "One day, your shape shifted and you became the stuff of nightmares . . . grotesquely deformed . . ." That sounds like acne. Okay, so maybe I *am* nuts. But the fact that a horror RPG got me thinking in this direction indicates there's something going on here besides the usual power fantasies and cheap thrills. Richly imagined, exorbitantly detailed, **Nightspawn** is like a splatter film designed by philosophy majors; its a cheesy, brainy delight.

By the way, as we were going to press with this, the name was changed to **Nightbane**. The initial printing of the game will say **Nightspawn**, but all future editions and supplements will bear the name **Nightbane**.

## The World of Necroscope

Masterbook game supplement



132-page softcover book

West End Games

\$20

Design: Ed Bolme

Editing and development: Greg Farshtey, Miranda Horner, and Bill Olmesdahl

Illustrations: Marshall Andrews III, Ron Kulp, Tim Bobko, and Thomas O'Neill

Cover: Bob Eggleton

My nominee for the horror book with the most gross-outs? Until today, I would've given the nod to a 1991 Call of Cthulhu adventure titled *Horror on the Orient Express* (reviewed in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #185); five years later, that train track made out of human organs still makes me wince. But now I have a new candidate. Based on the novels of Brian Lumley, **Necroscope** details a war between group of paranormal super-spies and the Wamphyri, a cult of savage vampires — and it's an eye-popper. Some random images... well, I wanted to tell you about a few, but I couldn't think of a way to describe them delicately. Suffice to say **Necroscope** celebrates viscera-soaked violence at its most excessive, and is guaranteed to make the faint of heart reach for their blood pressure medication.

As in the Lumley novels, **Necroscope** takes place in the late 20th Century, an era that hasn't been kind to the Wamphyri. Centuries of persecution have taken their toll; the vampire population has dwindled, and the survivors are more desperate — and nastier — than ever. Vicious, powerful, and startlingly intelligent, these are no ordinary vampires. A Wamphyri's plastic-like proto-flesh allows it to transform into any shape it likes, enabling it to grow fins, multiple limbs, and extra eyes more or less at will. It dabbles in alchemy and voodoo, masters as many as a dozen psychic talents, and feasts on anything that breathes — including fellow Wamphyri. When its ready to reproduce, a Wamphyri passes an egg into a warm-blooded host where it lodges behind the hosts beating heart. In lieu of laying an egg, a Wamphyri can generate offspring by amputating chunks of its own flesh; these chunks develop into semi-sentient freaks resembling dog-sized amoebas.

Count Dracula is to a Wamphyri as a garter snake is to a king cobra. The level of detail borders on overkill — an entire paragraph to describe a Wamphyri's ear? — but it's never less than fascinating.



Players assume the roles of paranormal heroes associated with a national espionage agency, such as the United Kingdom's E-Branch or the USA's mysterious Affiliate. The character creation system combines the basic skills from Masterbook (Acrobatics, Swimming, Fire Combat) with a host of new psychic "gifts" (Necromancer, Sensitive, Telepath). Though the gifts aren't particularly flashy — no fireballs, no explosions, no elaborate incantations — they produce jaw-dropping effects. A Telepath reads minds by worming through his victims' brains with psychic pseudopods. A character using the Necromancer gift to speak with a corpse literally rends the corpse to pieces; the effort often ends with the Necromancer splattered with blood, flesh between his teeth.

Unfortunately, the designers had a rough time wedging all this into the Masterbook system (and you can't play *Necroscope* without having Masterbook). Masterbook's special effects rules require a long list of modifications to accommodate *Necroscope's* ESP skills. For example: "If a [psychic character] succeeds in the psionic skill attempt, subtract the target's resistance from the effect value, and modify all subsequent ESP attempts by that number." The Sensitive skill, which functions as sort of a psychic Geiger counter, is based a nebulous formula that I'm still trying to decipher (success = target value - range value + SFX effect value + ESP skill roll modifier). Though the Wamphyri's physical description is impressive, there's little about its history or culture. And the excellent section of role-playing tips sets up an introductory adventure that's too short and too predictable.

**Evaluation:** As a read, *Necroscope* is a winner — passionate, disturbing, always entertaining. As a game, it's so-so — great setting, inspired adversaries, clunky rules. Take the parental advisory on the cover seriously; *Necroscope* is a gore-fest for grown-ups.

### Blood Types

GURPS\* game supplement  
128-page softcover book  
Steve Jackson Games \$18  
*Design:* Lane Grate  
*Editing:* Jeff Koke and Scott Haring  
*Illustrations:* Dan Smith  
*Cover:* Tim Bradstreet



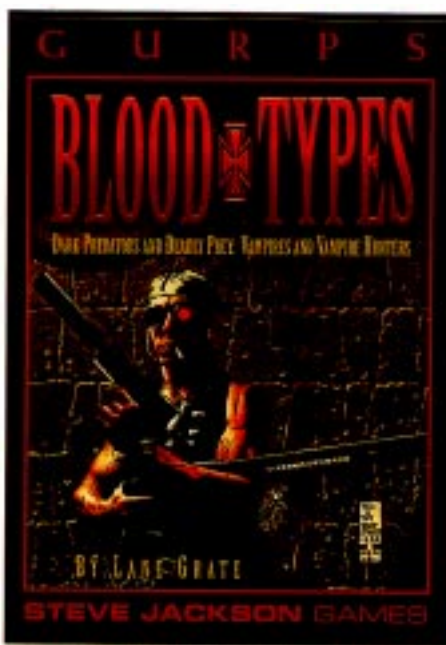
### The Cairo Guidebook

Call of Cthulhu game  
supplement



112-page softcover book  
Chaosium Inc. \$17  
*Design:* Marion Anderson  
*Editing:* Lynn Willis and Janice Sellers  
*Illustrations:* Mark Ryberg  
*Cover:* Charlie Krank and Eric Vogt

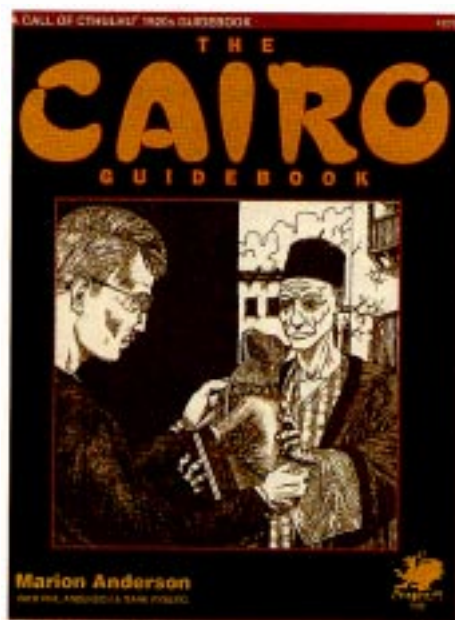
RPG products aren't getting any cheaper, so why invest in a sourcebook containing information you can find yourself for free? A sourcebook has to pass the Library Test to earn my recommendation; if I can find most of the material in my local library without trying too hard, it flunks.



*Blood Types* passes with flying colors. Intended for GURPS, but adaptable to other game systems with a little effort, it's an encyclopedia of vampire lore that should satisfy all but the most fanatic horror buff. The book opens with a history of bloodsuckers, beginning ancient Mesopotamian legends (where unburied corpses became restless and hungry, then prowl the world for snacks), and ends with some of the modern era's grisliest serial killers (like Peter Kurten, "the Dusseldorf Vampire," a throat-slashing maniac who claimed his first victims at the age of nine).

The character creation section inventories every conceivable racial attribute, including poison immunity, aversion to mirrors, and chronic body odor (which may be masked with heavy colognes). Imaginative combat mechanics explain how to dispatch vampires with Jeruja thorns and holy water bombs. The Bestiary, the books highlight, describes

nearly two dozen variants in shuddery detail; the African Adze commands insect swarms and feeds on children, the Maylayan Langsoir takes the form of a screech owl and can only be killed by stuffing hair into the second mouth in the back of its neck. Despite the occasional lapse — a ho-hum spell list, the superficial campaign outlines — *Blood Types* stands as an impeccable blend of research and rules.



The *Cairo Guidebook*, a resource for staging Call of Cthulhu adventures in 1920s Egypt, also boasts an amazing amount of research. It not only lists Alexandria's shops and restaurants, it gives their street addresses (the British Book Club is located at 5 Rue Adib.) and business hours ("open from 9 A.M. to 1 P.M."). The Transportation section specifies the prices, routes, and colors of 16 different streetcars. Looking for a hospital? You have a choice of seven. Want to travel up the Nile? Will that be by steamer (pick one of a dozen, leaving weekly), train (departing twice a day from Central Cairo Railway Station), or lateen-rigged felucca (a sailboat, leaving whenever you like)? There's also a terrific set of maps, perhaps the best-ever in a Cthulhu product, including blueprints of the Great Temple of Amun Ra and the Pyramid of Cheops. But supernatural phenomena, the heart of Cthulhu, is as scarce as peace and quiet in a day care center. Where's the Mythos? What happened to the monsters? We get a page or two about the Cities of the Dead, a couple of columns devoted to Egyptian magic, and that's about it. The skeletal adventure

hooks also disappoint; a sample, in its entirety, referring to a harbor built by Ramses II: "What enigmatic — even horrific — statuary may be revealed in the morning if the covering sand is washed away by a storm the previous night?"

**Evaluation:** Maybe you don't have access to a library as good as mine (I'm within walking distance of a university). If not, and you're hankering to spruce up an Egyptian Call of Cthulhu campaign with some real-life window dressing, you can do worse than the **Cairo Guidebook**. But if you want to see what a first-class travelogue looks like, one that doesn't skimp on the scares, pass up Cairo and check out Terror Australis (Cthulhu in Australia). **Blood Types**, on the other hand, belongs on the shelf of every horror aficionado who's had his fill of recycled Bela Lugosis; add this to **Necroscope**, and you'll have cornered the market on freaky vampires.

## Short and sweet

**Comme Il Faut: All Things Right and Proper**, by Thomas E. Olam and Michael A. Pondsmith with Barrie Rosen, Hilary Ayers, Gilbert Milner, and Ross Winn.

R. Talsorian Games, Inc., \$17

This supplement for the Castle Falkenstein\* game serves up all manner of odds and ends pertaining to neo-Victorian society in the Age of Steam. Included are excerpts from *Lady Agatha's Book of Etiquette and Faerie Manners* ("Never address your social betters first, unless you are on intimate terms with them"), a style guide for the well-dressed gentleman (linen shirt, frock coat, top hat), and tips for keeping up appearances (by all means, hire a maid). The Rules of Engagement chapter expands on the original game mechanics, clarifying the use of Fortune Cards and streamlining the combat system. If you're not the neo-Victorian type, you'll probably find **Comme Il Faut** rough going. For the lords and ladies of New Europa, however, it's as fun as a garage sale at Buckingham Palace.

**The Sword of the Dales, The Secret of Spiderhaunt, and The Return of Randal Morn**, all by Jim Butler. TSR, Inc., \$7 each.

Presented in three parts, this quest for a lost sword serves as an excuse to send a party of low-level AD&D gamers on a rambling, magic-drenched joyride through some of wildest locales in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting. It begins in a Shadowdale inn and ends on the battlefields of

the Border Forest, with stops along the way at a wizard's crypt, a gnome village, and a bridge made of snakes. Familiar territory? Sure. But it's still a hoot, perfect for initiating newcomers or reminding veterans what attracted them to AD&D in the first place. If you can only afford one episode (each can be played independently), go with the number two, **The Secret of Spiderhaunt**, which features tense encounters with giant arachnids and antisocial undead.

**Virtual Realities 2.0**, by Paul Hume with Carl Sargent and Michael Mulvihill. FASA Corporation, \$18.

As veteran netrunners will confirm, the cumbersome Matrix system has always been the weakest element of the Shadowrun\* game. FASA comes to the rescue with this overdue revision, which trims the fat from the original, upgrades the rules for Matrix mapping, and, in general, makes cyberspace a more enjoyable place to play. Shadowrun without the Matrix is like the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game without the dungeons, so consider this essential.

**Avengers in Lankmar**, by slade. TSR, Inc., \$10.

An intricate AD&D scenario for the Lankmar setting, Avengers features a renegade thief named Elad Edals, a team of over-the-hill mercenaries known as Club Blood, and an urban sprawl so convoluted that I had a hard time finding my way around, even with the poster-sized street map. Players looking for monsters and magic won't find much, but they'll still encounter plenty of surprises; collapsing manholes, exploding coin purses, and rot grub sandwiches are but a few of the goofy obstacles. Designer slade, urges the DM to study the **Lankmar: City of Adventure** supplement before tackling this, but I disagree; **Avengers** runs fine all by itself.

**Star Wars Classic Adventures**, by Paul Arden Lidberg, Brian J. Murphy, Gary Haynes, Bill Olmesdahl, Eric S. Trautman, and Chuck Truett. West End Games, \$18.

Well, they're adventures all right. But I'm not sure about the classic part. "The Abduction of Crying Dawn Singer," concerning the rescue of a kidnapped music star, sacrifices characterization for action, resulting in a diverting but unmemorable plot. "The Politics of Contraband," a collection of five scenarios about space smugglers, is mostly routine space opera. Next time, West End might consider

repackaging Twin Stars of Kira or Supernova. Or better yet, how about updates of Tatooine Manhunt or Scavenger Hunt, from the first edition *Star Wars*\* game? Now those are *real* classics.

**Redemption\*** game, by Rob Anderson. Cactus Game Design, Inc., \$10 for two-deck starter set (100 cards), \$1.50 per booster pack (eight cards).

In the past, certain factions of the religious community have been, shall we say, less than supportive of fantasy gaming. I wonder what they'll make of this.

**Redemption**, a collectible card game based on the Bible, teems with magical weapons (Helmet of Salvation, Fiery Darts, Shield of Faith), heroic persona (Gideon, Barnabas, Mighty Warrior), and other conventions popularized by good old DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. Players compete on a Field of Battle to see who can be first to rescue five Lost Souls held prisoner in the Land of Bondage. Each side deploys character cards, modifies them with enhancement and specialty cards (Poison, Treachery, Chariots of Iron), then compares the defensive and offensive ratings; defeated characters leave the battlefield, triumphant ones retrieve Souls. All told, **Redemption** plays like a stripped-down Magic: The Gathering\* game, too slight to sustain the interest of hard-core card players, but good for beginners. Considering the source material, the cards are surprisingly lurid; the Boils card shows a battle casualty with blister-covered hands, the Locust from the Pit card depicts a half-man/half-insect creature that looks like a refuge from Call of Cthulhu. Who'd have thought a game like this could give you the creeps?

Information: Cactus Game Design, Inc., 1553 South Military Highway, Chesapeake, VA 23320.



Rick Swan has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products, and has played nearly a zillion. You can write to him at 2620 30th Street, Des Moines, IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed envelope if you'd like a reply.

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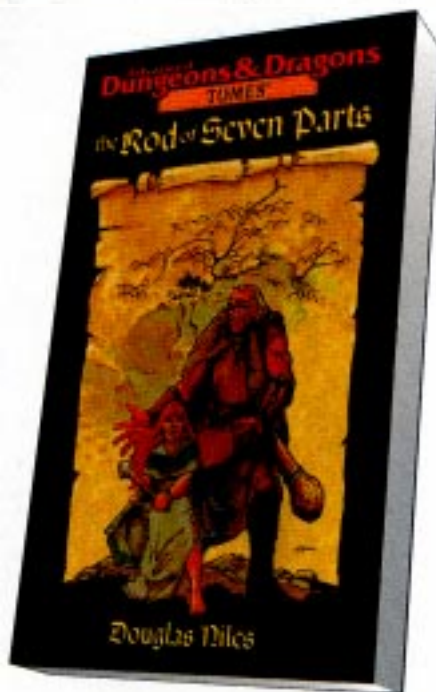
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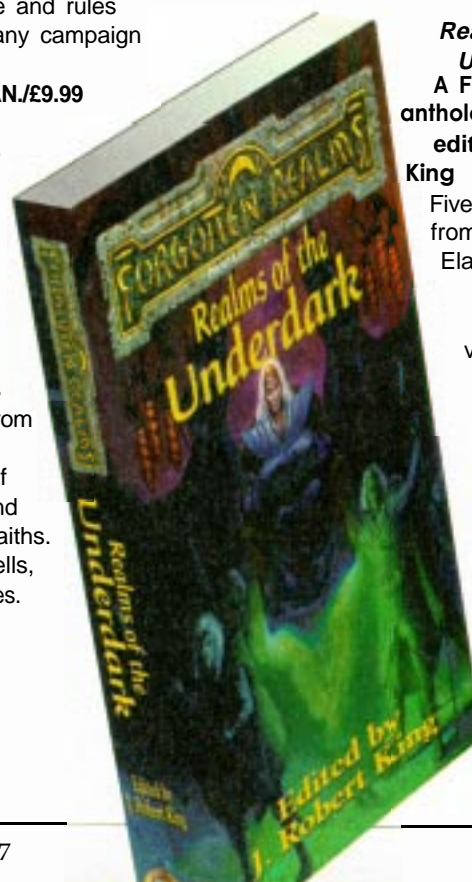
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Cover art by Tony Szczudlo

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TSR Announces

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to White Wolf, but to the retailers and distributors who keep our hobby alive.... Our layoffs were a result of mistakes I made in forecasting White Wolf's growth; they are not a result of our industry tanking out, or of our games being any less well received."

**Developer friction:** Though management spent several days after the announcement deciding which employees would go, at least one was definitely identified right away: Wraith co-designer and Vampire game line developer Jennifer Hartshorn. Her layoff caused tension between company management and the other Storyteller line developers for reasons unrelated to finances.

In two messages posted to an Internet newsgroup about White Wolf games, Hartshorn, who joined the company in April 1994 at age 22, claimed that her dismissal was due to creative differences.

**The future:** The company's strong sales to a loyal audience make its survival very likely, and hopes are high that the Rage expansion War Across the Amazon will solve the crisis. The April publication of the Dark Ages game should also bring relief. But though he plans to stay with White Wolf, Mage game developer Brucato says White Wolf represented "one of the most glorious experiments in publishing, and I'm just afraid at this point it may be over."

## Happier notes from the field

Not all is gloom. TSR (Lake Geneva, WI) posted a press release announcing that 1995 revenues from its role-playing lines increased 20% over the previous year, as they have for the last six years. TSR currently employs about 175 people.

Enriched by its successful Illuminati: New World Order\* trading card game, Steve Jackson Games (Austin, TX) continues an ambitious support program for the GURPS\* game, its Generic Universal RolePlaying System. Sourcebooks now out or coming soon cover Greece, Celtic myth, magical places of power, Egypt, dinosaurs, giant robots, Martial Arts second edition, and new editions of Autoduel and the basic rulebook (with all new art). The GURPS line now includes over 120 products, over 40 currently in print. SJG, which employs about 20 people, recently signed a deal giving the dis-

tributor Capital City exclusive rights to distribute SJG products to comic-book stores; SJG's existing distributor network servicing gaming stores will not change.

Freelance designer and frequent *DUNGEON® Adventures* contributor Ted Zuvich (Renton, WA) has a major new line on his resume. At 12:25 A.M. on December 20, 1995, Ted's wife, Eli, gave birth to the couple's first child, Alexander William Thomas Zuvich (8 pounds 4 ounces). Parents and child are doing well.

### Correction:

Last issue's "Current Clack" column misspelled the name of White Wolf's Werewolf game line developer, Ethan Skemp. Our apologies.

*Allen Varney is an author, game designer, and editor. Send any gaming industry-related news to him by e-mail at a.varney1@genie.com.*

\* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.

## Changes at TSR, Inc.

TSR, Inc. has announced a major expansion to its Sales and Marketing Department: the addition of a Customer Service support team.

"We're beginning the new year with a huge commitment to our distributor and retail customers," said Lorraine Williams, TSR president. "We feel the best way to support the hobby and TSR product lines is to strengthen our distributor relationships . . . and to increase direct communication with distributors and retailers."

TSR has closed its Mail Order Hobby Shop operation as of January 15. "We are turning the sales of TSR games over to retailers," said Williams. "Our company's best efforts are focused on producing games and books, not selling to consumers. In addition, our talented telemarketing staff will direct the company's new customer support team."

For those readers trying to find a retailer near them who stocks TSR merchandise, call the support line at 1-800-394-4TSR (1-800-394-4877).

# Life May Begin At Forty, But Heart Disease Can Begin At Four.



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# the Current Clack

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## GDW shuts down

GDW, one of the oldest companies in the adventure gaming hobby, has ceased operations. The Chicago-based publisher of the Traveller\* and Twilight: 2000\* role-playing games stopped selling product on January 19 and was planning to shut down completely by the end of February.

"We'll do the best we can to take care of everybody and find good homes for our games," said comptroller Susan Schug. GDW did not file for bankruptcy, nor did it flood the market by selling off its Inventory at a discount; this makes its game lines more attractive to other publishers. Two licensed miniatures games, the Johnny Reb\* and Harpoon\* games, have reverted to owners John Hill and Larry Bond, respectively. The war game company Clash of Arms will do the next edition of the Harpoon board game Traveller game designer Marc Miller says that all versions of the Traveller game will revert to him. The disposition of other GDW games remains to be seen; former GDW employee Loren Wiseman says these games, too, will revert to their designers.

**End of an era:** Of the publishers that survive from the beginning of the adventure gaming hobby in the early '70s, only Avalon Hill, Flying Buffalo, and TSR are older than GDW, which was founded in 1973 as Game Designers' Workshop. (Another venerable survivor, Chaosium, dates from 1974.) GDW first specialized in high-quality war games on historical subjects overlooked by the hobby's major publishers, Avalon Hill and SPI: the Crimean War, the Roman civil war, one of the first games treating the American Revolution, and so on. Later GDW published the Europa series, a gargantuan, division-level simulation of World War II's European Theatre.

In the mid and late '70s GDW ventured into science fiction war games with such admired designs as the Imperium\* and Asteroid\* games, as well as the quirky Double Star\* game, a combat

between Arab and Chinese spaceships. In 1977 the company branched into role-playing with the Traveller game.

The Traveller game was the first successful science fiction RPG. It saw later incarnations as the Megatraveller\* game (1987) and the Traveller: The New Era\* game (1994). In these and the Twilight: 2000 and 2300 AD\* RPGs (1985 and 1986) the company showed its war-game roots, for the campaign backgrounds and adventures featured a strong militaristic flavor. Some of these RPGs won awards and devoted followings, yet the GDW founders never felt entirely at home in the role-playing hobby. They regarded the company's RPGs as a means to support their first love. Notable GDW war games from this time include the Assault, Third World War, and First Battles Series.

In the late '80s, as other RPG publishers increasingly emphasized storytelling and atmosphere, GDW's Space: 1889\* (1988), Cadillacs & Dinosaurs\* (1989), and Dark Conspiracy\* (1991) RPGs could not find an audience. The rules-heavy Dangerous Journeys\* game (1992) did a belly-flop. After the Traveller: The New Era game brought a lukewarm response from longtime fans, GDW gradually dwindled away.

**Next:** At the end only two employees remained, Schug and founding designer Frank Chadwick. Chadwick, 1984 inductee into the Adventure Gaming Hall of Fame and one of the most respected designers in the industry, will now work freelance. He plans to remain involved with his historical games (over five dozen at last count) after they go to other publishers Schug's plans were uncertain.

## White Wolf layoffs

In early January, White Wolf Game Studio (Atlanta, GA) laid off 15 employees from all parts of the company, and president Stephan Wieck said that despite strong sales the company was in serious financial trouble. WW staffers cited several reasons, including over-hiring, a sud-

den downturn in the trading card game market, and several factors beyond the company's control.

White Wolf publishes the Storyteller line of RPGs (the Vampire\*, Werewolf\* Mage\*, Wraith\*, and Changeling\* games, 1991-95) and the Rage\* card game (1994), as well as two successful fiction lines. Company revenues were growing, but not at levels that had been hoped for.

"We're selling more than we ever have," said Mage line developer Phil Brucato. "But people got into a 'prosperity mentality,' there was bad judgement, and the company expanded too quickly." There was also a long run of bad luck. A string of printer errors delayed many products past the Christmas season. A program that offers retailers special racks to display White Wolf merchandise has been delayed more than four months by the manufacturer, costing White Wolf "several hundred thousand dollars," says Brucato.

Perhaps worst of all, the computerized accounting system crashed disastrously and through human error took all the backups with it. The company spent two to three months reconstructing the accounts by hand.

"The choice was horribly difficult for the management to make, I know," wrote WW Internet representative Trace O'Connor in a post explaining the layoffs, which included her own job. "White Wolf grew very fast, and when you get too big for your breeches [sic], you're bound to split a seam — they're always a little smaller when you sew them up. WW will be around for a while, though."

Others let go include one of WW's first hires, artist Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, and people in sales, marketing, and accounting. The company is not cancelling any game or fiction lines.

"We're going to keep putting out products as we always have," Wieck wrote in a public Internet post. "All of us at White Wolf would truly appreciate everyone's continued support — not only

*Continued on page 119*



# TSR's Biggest Contest Ever!

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**No purchase necessary to enter or win.** Entries must be received by June 15, 1996. See your participating **TSR DRAGON Month retailer** and the **AD&D Triviathlon: The Arcane Challenge Contest Entry Poster** for complete details and contest rules. The AD&D Triviathlon Clue Line. Each day you will receive a different, prerecorded clue for one, or possibly two, of the 100 AD&D Triviathlon questions in sequential order. We'll start with the clue for Question #1 on March 1, 1996 and end with the clue for Question #100 on May 31, 1996. These clues are available for one day only and will not be repeated on any other day. Get a new clue (or two) each day beginning 8 a.m. Eastern Standard Time!

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# MARCH

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